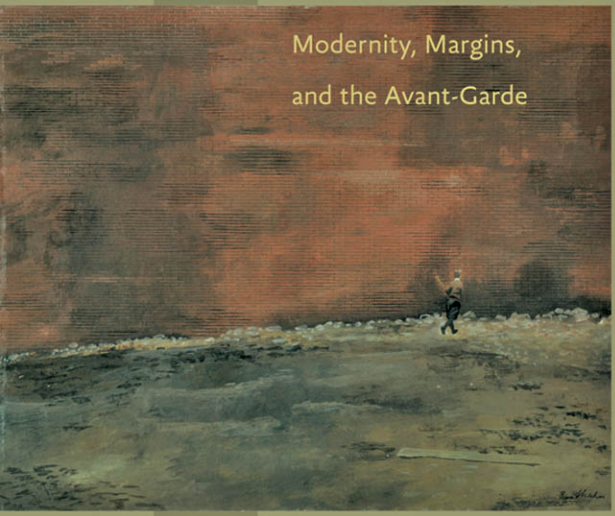
Ruth Jennison

The Zukofsky Era

Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde



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The Zukofsky Era

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Douglas Mao, *Series Editor*

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Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde

Ruth Jennison

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For my mother, Dr. Carol Rosala Jennison

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This book is dedicated to my uncompromisingly independent mother, Dr. Carol Rosala Jennison, who has imparted to me at least some of her signature intellectual curiosity and warm embrace of all who struggle.

The Zukofsky Era

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Introduction

AN ERA
ANY TIME
OF YEAR

Louis Zukofsky, *"A"*—22

What we are actively seeking is the true practice which has been alienated to an object, and the true conditions of practice—whether as literary conventions or social relationships—which have been alienated to components or mere backgrounds.

Raymond Williams

This book takes as its object of study the Depression-era works of three poets who constellated around the aesthetic nexus of Objectivism: Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen, and Lorine Niedecker.[1] Objectivism was a high modernism, but it was also a modernism whose practitioners remained in constant contact with the diverse and radical cultures that sprouted from crisis-driven cracks in the edifice of capitalism.[2] Objectivism's numbers included Jews, Yiddish speakers, feminists, working-class women and men, rural dwellers, Communists, and first-generation immigrants. Existence on these margins provided the foundational texture for Objectivists' lived experience of the "immense left force-field" of 1930s America.[3] While the Objectivists treated in this book shared with the canonical modernists an interest in experiment and innovation, they also held commitments to radical democracy and the realization of the cultural potentials simultaneously unleashed and constrained by capitalist modernity, commitments that they saw as the political parallels of their artistic avant-gardism.

Objectivism provides the textual firmament for the analyses that follow. However, the methodology that underwrites these analyses is portable to the study of other avant-gardes and modernisms, diverse in their spatial and historical emergences. This book addresses the following questions: How can we establish a relationship between the spatial landscapes of capitalism in crisis and the formal choices of the revolutionary avant-garde? Is there a way to draw on the rich formalist traditions of close reading modernist poetics while also attending to the historical complexity of the situation in which modernist texts are produced? Can we energize the key concepts of materialist aesthetics—the tyranny of the commodity form; the text (and its producer) as an active mediation of a history that precedes it; the contest between the intra- and international uneven spaces of capital with which every text must engage—in a methodology specific to the study of poetics, and poetic modernism in particular? These questions guide this book both in its study of Objectivism and also in its broadest ambition: the opening up of a vocabulary especially suited to articulating the origin of modernist form in the tectonic dynamism of American capitalist production of space.

To these ends, this volume reads against the grain of traditional accounts of modernist fragmentation. Prior to the recent emergence of the New Modernist Studies, literary historians and critics tended to characterize high-modernist Anglo-American poets as possessing a pessimistic perspective, of a culture in disarray, often resulting in a turn toward reactionary political solutions that were at odds with the ideals underlying these poets' use of pathbreaking forms.[4] Despite the objections of a new generation of scholars of modernism who resist tempting but specious speculations regarding the imprint of a subject supposedly fragmented by modern life upon the text, the account of modernist fragmentation enjoys an institutional hegemony. Such hegemony persists, in part, because fragmentation supplies students with a useful metaphor with analysis of modernist form in which fragments melancholically register the unstoppable proliferation of immigrant languages in the metropole and the sharding of the world produced by anticolonial resistance. Consider the breeziness with which David Perkins, in his otherwise indispensable *A History of Modern Poetry*, performs a rather magical parapsychological measurement of "consciousness," and then aligns this with modernist form on the one hand and a curiously universal "experience" on the other: "The fragmentation and disconnection of modern consciousness had repeatedly been displayed from *The Waste Land* on . . . stylistic

features of the [modernist] text—syntactical discontinuity, fragmentation, juxtaposition of the heterogeneous, banality—represent similar qualities in experience."[5] While it is questionable whether such critical discourse can even account for the practices of the very canonical texts that seem to invite it (we can't help but hear Eliot: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"), it is clear that fragmentation, as a concept, cannot do justice to the form and vision of those American modernists for whom revolutionary politics inform solidaristic landscapes and internationalist imaginations. Fragmentation, it turns out, is less a formal descriptor than it is a narrative about the ways in which a lamenting liberalism invokes an essentially conservative ontology. In this genealogy, modernist texts signal a regretful fall from the place prior to imperialist and class conflict.[6]

Objectivists challenge said notions of modernist fragmentation with a poetics whose paratactical adjacencies map what critical geographers like David Harvey identify as capitalist modernity's transnational combined and uneven developments. Parataxis, as I will show, is the formal deployment of a radical agency, wherein discrete particulars are placed side by side; textual analysis will demonstrate that paratactical construction is the signature strategy of Objectivism. Through parataxis, Objectivists investigate the correspondences, connections, and asymmetries between the historically distant and socially distinct particulars that their poems arrange. In doing so, Objectivists defamiliarize the cultural particulars they call upon; paratactical form throws into relief the historical and material specificity of each particular against that of its neighbor. To illustrate: think, for example, of the famous opening strains of Zukofsky's *"A,"* in which the poet attends Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in Carnegie Hall, and upon leaving, encounters a street containing "tramps," labor organizers, and agitators, the voices of which are intermingled with those of the exiting giddy concertgoers and their light praise of the performance. In these scenes, 1729 (the date of what Zukofsky believed to be the first performance of the *Passion* in Leipzig) illuminates the class character of 1928 (the year of the performance and the poem's inception), and vice versa.[7] Surveying the turgid bourgeois mien of those in attendance, Zukofsky notes the "Black full dress of the audience," and asks, "Dead century, where are your motley / Country people in Leipzig"?[8] It turns out that in this dead century the motley people are to be found creating culture, not consuming it; they gather "on one side street near an elevated,"

Lamenting,
Foreheads wrinkled with injunctions:
"The Pennsylvania miners are again on the lockout,
We must send relief to the wives and children—
What's your next editorial about, Carat,
We need propaganda, the thing's
becoming a mass movement." (3)

Where Bach's eighteenth century witnessed the influx of the country into the urban cultural landscape (due in large part to the effects of enclosure and accumulation by dispossession), Zukofsky's twentieth finds the urban dispossessed exiled from the artifacts of high culture, engaged in forging material solidarities with workers in the industrial centers of rural capitalist production. In both instances, cultural production is an index of the spatial logic of two very different moments in the variegated history of social class and material life. Through the paratactical compression of the historical bookends of cultural life under capitalism, Zukofsky's passage historicizes the authorizing conditions of its own production, while also illuminating the ways in which the past is ever mediated by the horizon of the present.

Zukofsky describes the process of paratactical construction in a suggestive passage from *"A"*—8:

bringing together facts
which appearances separate:
all that is created in a fact
is the language that numbers it,
The facts clear, breath lives
with the image each lights. (102)

Where Imagism had drawn a nimbus around the data of lived experience and called it a particular, Objectivism seeks to reveal that immediacy is itself a formal mediation of historical developments that predate its appearance. For Zukofsky, these developments are recorded in the calculus ("numbers") of discourse ("language"). This is not to say that Objectivism enervates its readers with a dogged pursuit of an ever-receding immediate world. Quite the opposite: its thorough examination of the thick layers that constitute fact anticipates and prepares the rehumanization of an alien world in which the facts dissolve themselves openly ("clear") into a new, animate relevance

in which "breath lives/with the image each lights." Through the comparisons of past and present that their paratactical adjacencies invite, Objectivists explore the contradictions and historical constitution of their own Depression-era "fact" and its prehistory in American capitalism.

The Historical Convergences in Which Objectivism Was Forged

This study treats Objectivism as a distinct revolutionary current within modernist poetics, whose practitioners' diverse oppositionalities informed their avant-garde experiments. Zukofsky, Oppen, and Niedecker responded to the crisis of the 1930s with a diversity of formal strategies, and, I would argue, a singularity of purpose: the crafting of an anticapitalist poetics that might emerge from the meeting of the oft-separated arts of activist direct confrontation and contemplative critique. To varying degrees and effects, Objectivists seek (1) to register in poetic form the contradictions of capitalism as structure and as lived experience, and (2) to yoke together these contradictions in such a way that reveals the geography of capitalism as a profoundly differentiated totality. What were the contradictions and institutional transformations that contoured Objectivism's situations and texts? By way of an answer, we might situate Objectivism within the ripple of three concentric circles of time and place.

Two opposing historical events, bound together by their opposition, furnish the first and most encompassing of Objectivism's historical conditions of possibility. The twentieth century's most visible of capitalist crises—the global Great Depression of the 1930s and the socialist revolutions conducted against the system of exploitation as a whole—combine and clash in a global, antagonistic unity. The rise of the twentieth-century *internationale*, whose shorthand might be "1917," precedes this crisis of overproduction in the system whose immiseration it seeks to abolish. The Great Depression is, of course, the crisis that ignites Objectivism, along with the host of other revolutionary arts that were produced during what Michael Denning has called "the cultural front."[9] The vastly asymmetrical relations between wages, profit, and the prices of commodities could no longer be papered over by an official ideology of their harmonious interdependence. All received notions of a modern progress balanced in its dispersal of benefits experienced a crisis of legitimacy. Unevenness was thrown into relief and intensified as the tectonics of this crisis widened the chasm between rural and urban forms of impoverishment nationally, and between the core and peripheral nations within the imperialist world system. For example, within the United

States, the lethal combination of climate crisis and economic depression led to a mass migration to northern and western urban centers, leaving rural areas subject to mechanized exploitation of the land and people.[10] But if the Depression intensified spatially organized impoverishment, it also produced many conditions for a surge in political activism. The Depression, that is to say, was also the context in which American Communism, having incubated for decades, enjoyed its greatest growth and made its deepest organizational impression upon the broadest swath of the American working class, in whose struggle Objectivists stood in solidarity. In the spirit of such catholic geographies of collapse and struggle, the chapters that follow explore the ways in which the three American poets metabolized the revolutionary upheavals of the second world, as well as the first.

This widespread radicalization, as is well documented, gave rise to what will be the second historical concentric circle: the massive expansion of anticapitalist print culture, arts, and letters funded by the Communist Party; by socialist, anarchist, and left liberal organizations; and by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), rechristened the Work Projects Administration in 1939.[11] Objectivism, while never officially allied with a political party or tendency, is nevertheless positioned among these Depression-era left cultural phenomena. Indeed, the Works Progress Administration employed Zukofsky as a contributor to *The Index of American Design,* an ambitious federal project to document American folk art, he and other Objectivists wrote occasional poems for *New Masses* and other radical print organs, Oppen organized for the Communist Party, and Niedecker was a research editor for the WPA guide to Wisconsin. The political sophistication of the works produced under Objectivism's mast offers an index of the degree to which the texts and discourses of revolutionary Marxism penetrated the consciousness of American poets, regardless of their organizational affiliation and/or stated political commitments. For some Objectivists, like Zukofsky and, to a lesser extent, Oppen, the pursuit and mastery of Marxist theory is central to the poetics they elaborate; for others, like Niedecker, Marxism and the cultures of radicalism arrive mediated by epistolary contact with a broader literary community, little journals, mass news organs, occasional urban expeditions, coterie contact, and, of course, the enduring left populist cultures of the American periphery.

On an individual basis, many other factors were necessary, if not sufficient, for the formation of the Objectivist poet. An increasing body of biographical work documents Objectivists' backgrounds in marginalized and

nonhegemonic social-subject positions. Zukofsky's Marxism is inseparable from his youth as a working-class first-generation Russian Jewish immigrant; Oppen's materialist poesis is bound up with both the contemplative alienation he nurtured as a young Jew and his maturation into Communist organizing; Niedecker's poetic studies of the mental topographies of ideology and its contradictions emerge, in part, from the parallax produced by her solitary feminism and her askance perspective from the rural periphery of capitalist America. Readers seeking a study illuminating each writer's expanse of career and person will be well served by the emerging biographical research; the concern of this book is rather with the discrete period of Objectivist production, and with the development of a methodology commensurate with the political geographies of radical modernist form. Where personal biography intersects with broader social formations, economic trajectories and world historical shifts, however, the following analyses draw upon it enthusiastically.[12] By placing Objectivists in the current of mass radicalization in general and revolutionary modernism in particular, this study analyzes how its texts register the ways in which individual oppression hooks into the eye of mass radicalization. Objectivist poetics, I contend, turn around a single and capacious question: what are the poetic forms adequate to a revolutionary period and the radical subjects branded by its fire?

This question brings us to the innermost and most specific of the concentric circles we have been ringing round Objectivism's historical location: Objectivism operates within what I call the Zukofsky Era. Readers will of course hear the echo of Hugh Kenner here, whose *The Pound Era* offered an intervention foundational to the ways in which modernist poetics were, and are, taught, read, and studied. *The Pound Era*, among its other accomplishments, merged person and periodization, with the former often swallowing the latter in an impossibly tangled web of literary allusion, coterie wrangling, and oddments of deliciously complex writerly details. I offer that the critical impact of Kenner's account was just as much about positioning Pound as Anglo-American modernism's central impresario as it was about the advancement of a specific ideology of modernist form under the banner of the poet's individual creative vision. The present work shares Kenner's approach to narrating a specific scene of modernism to the extent that Objectivism in general, and Zukofsky's Objectivist work in particular, furnishes the textual coordinates for our examination of the formal and political program of revolutionary modernism. However, it departs in comradely fashion from Ken-

ner's methodology on at least one important point. Our own periodization attempts to mark a moment in the development of the Anglo-American avant-garde in which earlier pathbreaking strategies of self-reflexivity are turned by the author on the author function itself. In this altered landscape, *Zukofsky* is a signifier referring primarily to the poet not as luminary but as a self-conscious mediation of a world that precedes him and that history has called him to arrange.

First-generation Anglo-American modernism begins with the spare negations of Imagism and proceeds through the Poundian epic's restoration of the totalizing and historical impulse; its embers finally burn brightly in the fantastical sublation of that same impulse in the holistic sacred symbolism of late Eliot. There are an infinite number of possible rearrangements of this arc, which might and should include those modernisms outside the still tenacious canon forged by New Criticism. However, the genealogical, provisional narrative sketched here identifies the key texts, movements, and poets to which Objectivists responded both directly and indirectly. Zukofsky's sustained epistolary relationship with Pound represented his longest and ultimately most influential contact with this first generation, and it is Pound's influence in particular that radiated out among other Objectivists. It is not uncommon to read a description of Zukofsky's, or Objectivism's, relationship to Pound as filial or that of tutee. Here it is worth quoting Kenner's rather jaunty example of such an account:

> The Objectivists seem to have been born mature, not to say middle-aged. The quality of their very youthful work is that of men who have inherited a formed tradition: the tradition of the cradle of which, less than twenty years previously, Ezra Pound had hoped to have Henry James, O.M. speak a few encouraging words. They are the best testimony to the strength of that tradition: the fact that it had substance separable from the revolutionary high spirits of its launching. None of them makes as if to ignite bourgeois trousers. All that was history. They simply got on with their work.[13]

This narrative of Objectivism, as just the latest inheritor of a pre-established tradition, is indeed a mark of an older model of literary historiography, a model increasingly eclipsed by accounts of modernism's breaks, diversities, and hybridities. Peter Nicholls warns helpfully: "Kenner is a little too keen to domesticate Objectivism by assimilating it to an already developed modernist poetics."[14] Indeed, Kenner's account compresses two dominant narratives about Objectivism: that it was yet another iteration of an enduring

modernism unflapped by the revolutions and crises of the early twentieth century, and that it should be remembered as a quiescent literary movement committed to the precision of craft rather than creation of literary forms responsible to a radically transformed global situation.

I don't dismay the ubiquity of the periodization *second-generation modernist,* despite the whiff of belatedness that lingers around the term. Indeed, it recognizes the ways in which Zukofsky and other Objectivists receptively adopted the previous generation's will to formal innovation, its unrelenting resistance to the dictates of tradition, and its dual commitments to the contours of the solitary image and to the aggressive juxtapositions that create vaster textscapes. *Second-generation modernist* here, however, also implies not simply sequence, but sublation, and announces the Objectivist supersession of certain formal contradictions and ideological foreclosures that had come to delimit the thinkable of Poundian modernism. In short, the Objectivists of the Zukofsky Era inherit the first generation's experimentalist break with prior systems of representation, and they strive to adequate this break to a futurally pointed content of revolutionary politics. To this end, these poets expropriate the formal tools of first-generation modernists and use them to announce a rupture not with the past but into the future.

A brief reading of this introduction's epigraph, Zukofsky's poem "AN ERA," closes this preliminary discussion of Objectivism's historical coordinates. The poem, this analysis demonstrates, offers an aphoristic meditation on the problems and promises of periodization.[15] Working out of Zukofsky's notebooks, Peter Quartermain reminds us of the thickly layered philologies that comprise this brief piece. Quartermain observes that Zukofsky sourced a "ten-volume *Century* dictionary" wherein the word *era* is glossed as "a series of years having some distinctive historical character," or "loosely, . . . a point of time notes for some event or occurrence." *Era* grows from the Latin root *aera*, "a sing. formed from *aera*, pl. the times of an account, counters, pl. of *aes*, ore, brass, money." Quartermain supplements his analysis with a voice from the archive: "Zukofsky's notebook explores the Latin and (selected) Greek antecedents of *era*, and cross-refers *aera* and *aes* to Lewis and Short ['s *A Latin Dictionary*]. *There* we find *aes alienum, 'the money of another*; hence, in reference to him who has it, *the sum owed, a debt.' Aes* can be wages, or pay, or a reward, and, in its plural, *aera*, 'the item of a computed sum.' "[16]

It is typical of the Objectivist imagination to recruit a deep semiotic verticality to explore history's horizontal, serial movements. Here residual

language (Latin) illuminates what words confined to the horizon of their present will always fail to reveal: that an era is an "accounting" of events, an account whose material antecedent is exploitation, expropriation, and exchange. An era is a way of speaking about history; it is not an empirically verifiable Linnaean taxonomy. An era can be simultaneous with other eras that might begin and end regardless of cycles either human-made or seasonal. The poem is alive to the asymmetries between narratives about history and the data of history itself; an era is a narrative that belongs to, but is distinguished from, the ambient situation ("year") in which it emerges. The naming of an era is a process that involves both selective exclusion and open possibility. In other words, an era so energetic and expansive that it can occur at any time of year might be christened in the service of obscuring other historical currents. Or: an era might describe an aleatory field, where any moment possesses the potential to generate alternative historical narratives striving toward the transformation of the present. It is certainly in this latter spirit of radical pluralism that the present work stakes its claims for an Objectivists' modernism and for a revolutionary modernity.

Three concepts, drawn from political economy, critical geography, and dialectics, illuminate the sophistication of the Objectivist project. In what follows, I explore in greater detail the methodologies that will contour our studies of the project's works.

Concept I: Combined and Uneven Developments

If an era can occur at any time of year, it can also be the case that at any given time multiple eras might be sharing the same moment competitively or synergistically, their layers and imbrications generated by an uneven temporal and spatial landscape. Objectivism's forms present to us an aesthetic index of precisely such global and national unevennesses. A Depression-era topography of vertiginously contiguous high and mass cultures, urban and rural economic landscapes, and agricultural and industrialized social relations provides a discomforting birthplace for Objectivist production. Writing from this stormy womb, Objectivists arrange diverse particulars that register the variegated geographical, social, and cultural landscapes of capitalist modernity. The unexpected adjacencies characteristic of Objectivist form construct textual negatives of corresponding proximities between the developments, de-developments, and overdevelopments produced simultaneously in theirs, the third, century of capital. In this study, the term *combined and uneven development* will describe this contradictory historical, cultural,

and spatial terrain in, and often against, which Objectivists develop their materials.

Scholars of global cultural production tend to use the conceptual frameworks of uneven development in their descriptions of the trans- and international environment in which different national literatures emerge.[17] Historians and critics of global modernisms in particular are similarly increasingly drawn to the political economic models proposed by transnational and postcolonial theorists of world systems.[18] The concept underpins, for example, Matei Calinescu's survey of the critical tradition that treats modernism as a movement that emerged in the Global South under the banner of what Perry Anderson insists is cultural anticolonialism.[19] Combined unevenness informs, as well, the latter's well-known "triangulation" thesis about the origins of continental modernism, which emphasizes the equal importance of ancien régime academicism, revolutionary socialism, and technological development in the formation of the European avant-garde.[20] Martin Puchner also draws on a theory of uneven development as he "confirms that the most radical forms of modernism occurred not in the most industrialized nations but in places where the forces of modernization confronted violently older forms of production and social organization."[21] Such approaches preserve a focus on the differentiated and asymmetrical globe in which modernisms emerge, while also attending the national specificity of modernism's bountiful iterations.[22]

Critical geographer David Harvey engages a dialectic between transnationally and nationally articulated spatial regimes in his deployment of combined and uneven development as a structuring logic to account for the ways in which capitalism produces a "variegated geographical environment."[23] For Harvey, uneven development is a broad concept that applies equally fruitfully to the asymmetries between various sectors of capitalist development, social enclaves and segregations, and geographically articulated developmental variation in and between nation-states. The present study of revolutionary modernism shares Harvey's concerns with the complex dynamics at play in all of these senses of the concept but is especially interested in the spatial contours of unevenness, as it presents itself both on the page and in the world. Indeed, it is one of Objectivism's chief tendencies to present uneven geographical particulars in strategic enjambments that reveal how seemingly unrelated uneven and unequal social formations operate in a mutually constitutive manner. This synergy of unevenness ceaselessly produces and reproduce spaces of hyper- and underdevelopment,

archaicism, and emergent cultural practice. In chapter 1, I explore Harvey's account of capitalism's tendency to seek out "spatial fixes" to its perpetual problem of overaccumulation. The "spatial fix" provides the basis of Harvey's analysis of the American Depression of the 1930s, accounting for how crisis in the core requires, and produces, new regions whose wealth it dispossesses; such spaces, we will see, contour much of early *"A."*[24] And are we not witnessing a modernist encounter with the effects of such a spatial fix when we read, in chapter 2, how George and Mary Oppen explore a New York City whose geographical expansion was not yet commensurate with that of its subway substructure? If the spaces that mark the incomplete territorialization of the land by the means of transportation present as barren, empty, and residual, is it not because a widening spatial fix renders their appearance thusly?

Attention to uneven development has the analytic advantage of bringing together the oft-separated histories of economic transformations, political formations, and social movements; likewise, the aesthetic artifacts of an unevenly structured world find their origins not only in a world that precedes them but in the aspirations of social actors contesting the shape of the society that will inherit them. By historical definition, the structuring of the twentieth-century world by imperialism and international anti-imperialist movements sutures every modernism, revolutionary or revanchist, to a globalized and globalizing substrate. Objectivism's texts testify to the constitutive role of revolutionary movements in the formation of not only the modernisms of the Anglo-European core and the peripheries of the Global South but of the United States as well. Indeed, Objectivism's constructivist constellations include actors and actions within diverse and global anticapitalisms; in these cases, adjacency, I argue, formally expresses the international solidarities characteristic of early-twentieth-century revolutionary struggles. The intimate adjacencies of revolutionary movements in Russia, China, and the United States in the Depression-era sections of Zukofsky's *"A,"* for example, invite inquiry into the shared telos of social actors separated by national scenes.

Uneven development, as a concept, has historically enjoyed broad application to the workings of capitalism. Marx argues, as early as the *Grundrisse,* that various prismatic sides of capitalist totality developed unevenly; for example, "artistic development" often leaps ahead of developments in "material production." Marx is concerned with the problem of the transition

from one mode of production to another; these transitions are often indexed by social categories whose development appears archaic or emergent against the backdrop of their historical totality.[25] In Marx, uneven development is a suggestive phrase, by turns referring to the critical frame through which historical analysis takes place, the landscape of capitalist development, and the inequality that quilts that development. Given the richness of its explanatory power, uneven development as a concept has been central to the development of twentieth-century political and cultural theory. In the Objectivists' own moment, it provided the cornerstone for the political arts of Lenin, Trotsky, and a host of revolutionary anti-imperialisms.[26]

I want to argue here for combined and uneven development as a universal analytic, one that applies just as powerfully to asymmetrical developments between national entities as to developments within the nation-state itself. To this end, this study examines how the international character of uneven capitalist development and the revolt against it forms the basis and prehistory of Objectivism's formal mediation of the combined unevennesses of the Depression-era American national interior. This analytic finds common cause with the global turn in studies of modernism, especially insofar as it restores the problem of spatiality to the analysis of modernism's—and capitalism's—transnational development. By examining the kinds of aesthetic strategies that emerged from an Objectivist modernism that understood itself as part of an *internationale*, I am also observing the ways in which the early-twentieth-century American avant-garde recaptures, in its anticapitalist solidarities, the spatial imagination from its birthplace in conquest and imperialism.

"Combined and uneven development" is Leon Trotsky's formulation, developed over the course of his analyses of the dynamics of capitalist development in Russia. Trotsky writes, "From the universal law of unevenness thus derives . . . the law of *combined development*—by which we mean a drawing together of different stages of the journey, a combining of the separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms."[27] Trotsky's assessment here emphasizes the dynamism between the international character of imperialism and the uneven structure of the Russian nation-state; it also lays the basis for his theory of "permanent revolution." This theory posits that revolution need not be conducted in stages; rather, due to the unevenness of Russian society, bourgeois, national, anticolonial, *and* socialist revolutions take place at once and together. Trotsky's rejection

of homogeneity and stagism in favor of differentiation and multiple temporal confluences finds its formal corollary in Objectivism's montages of simultaneous and sometimes opposing historical and cultural currents.

Trotsky, then, lends us a political economy whose tenets guide our spatially-driven strategy of reading Objectivism's forms. Trotsky's biographical alignment with international modernism is well documented; most famously, he coauthored "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art" with André Breton in 1938. While Trotsky's direct contact with American modernism was limited by his geographical and ideological exile, some Objectivists did read Trotsky's writing, including Oppen, who studied the *History of the Russian Revolution* together with his wife, Mary. My focus here is less these literary connections, or even the biographical resemblances between Trotsky and, for example, Zukofsky (also a Jewish Marxist of Russian provenance with a history of critical support for the Communist Party), than the degree to which Trotsky's account and Objectivist practice offer a contemporaneous index of the transformations and crises in global capitalism in the first four decades of the twentieth century.

When brought to bear upon literary aesthetics, the critical insights that spring from the analytic of combined and uneven development speak to long-standing questions about modernist practice: Does modernism leave us with a record of embracing the social whole, or with a melancholic diary of endless differentiation and slippage? How do we reconcile critical narratives of modernism that cite its commitment to the "new" alongside those that document its affinity for an often eccentric collection of premodern aesthetic traditions?

Objectivism's dual affinities toward epic-length embracing structures on the one hand and, on the other hand, the dissonant presentation of the contents of those very totalities formally imprint precisely the conditions of combined and uneven development described by Trotsky and renewed in the work of Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre grounds a spatial analytic in the twin tendencies of capitalism: the production of an interconnected, totalizable and often increasingly homogenized world-system is bound to its verso page, the endless differentiation of the system's component parts into "fragmented and fractured" spaces "in accordance with the division of labor and of the division of needs and functions."[28] Here lies the historical footprint of Trotsky's analytic; class conflict takes place in regions and nation-states that are proliferated by the global development of imperialism. Lefebvre's analysis insists on the interdependence of these contradictory tendencies toward

differentiation and homogenization. In this light, a text like Oppen's *Discrete Series* is helpfully illuminated as a bicameral rendering of the autonomous appearance of actors and objects in their corrugated landscapes, and the capitalist unities that render them thusly.

Not only modernist form, but the formation of modernism as object of study in general takes place within a context of combined and uneven developments. Consider, for example, that Objectivism as a historical event precedes the institutionalization of modernism as a coherent aesthetic ideology, an ideology, Fredric Jameson notes, that was "invented by the Old South" in the 1950s and '60s as Fugitive poets and their fellow travelers populated the academy.[29] Jameson's observation reveals the extent to which modernism's canon itself developed out of the asymmetries of American national development. The analyses contained in this book similarly treat canonical American "modernism" as a historically specific and distinct set of formal parameters, aesthetic assumptions and political orientations. To cite the copresence of Objectivism with a canon that has enjoyed more study is to note that modernism not only aesthetically registers spatial and temporal unevenness, but that its very genealogy is a map of the wild diversity of political and aesthetic responses to that unevenness.

Concept II: The Commodity Form

Objectivism's emergence marks the American avant-garde's first conscious engagement with a Marxist analysis of the commodity form. The consumer commodity was under Depression-era threat. Its patina of inherent, asocial value was increasingly besmirched by a mass Steinbeckian consciousness that condemned the contradiction between overproduction and scarcity. The 1920s saw a well-documented explosion of the diversification of commodities in possession of identical use values, alongside the deliberate production of the consumer-citizen through the use of mass advertising and the culture industry. These tendencies were accompanied, of course, by a considerable increase in the rate of exploitation, crushing defeats in key industries for the American Federation of Labor, and an unbroken decade of Jim Crow. The crisis of overproduction quickly revealed a structural irony: the scarcity of those very commodities so recently made available to market to the workers who had produced them. This contradiction posed a question with historical urgency: how and why does the commodity's apparent value fluctuate despite its unchanged form? Zukofsky began *"A"* just before the Depression (as bourgeois economists have narrowly periodized

it); its first section was completed in 1928. During the late 1920s, Niedecker began training herself in the practices of Surrealism; and Oppen began poems later to appear in *Discrete Series*. Objectivism, as a poetic movement, germinated in the unfolding of the commodity form's crisis of legitimacy.

The commodity form and the fetishism thereof, Marx argues famously, is not simply the illusory veil under which a kernel of labor secretly nests. The commodity's form of appearance adopts "the social characteristics of men's labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things."[30] This metalepsis arises from the process by which commodities are removed from the hands of their producers and rerepresented to these producers as part of a system of exchange that equates object's values with one another, rather than with the labor power that produced them. In short, capitalism's expropriations are not to be found in the hidden *content* of the commodity form. Rather, they constitute the commodity form itself. As Slavoj Žižek explains, "Work assume[s] the *form* of the value of a commodity" because "it can affirm its social character only in the commodity-form of its product."[31] Žižek urges here a hermeneutic of form that attends to the commodity's specific historical genesis, its aesthetic, economic and cultural presentation, and perhaps most importantly, the potentiality for its transformation by those in possession of the revolutionary literacy such a hermeneutic fosters.

Whether autodidacts of Marx's theory of the commodity form, as was the case with Oppen and Zukofsky, or educated by the commodity's tyrannical ambience in the households of lived experience, as in the instance of Niedecker, Objectivists write from the place of that widening gap between the commodity's asocial form and its social content. Indeed, the very name "Objectivism," I would argue, finds its origins in the dialectical portrait painted by Marx in the passage cited in the preceding paragraph, in which he describes, perhaps counterintuitively, the mystifications of commodity fetishism as emerging from objective conditions. This passage from Marx, as chapter 3 will reveal, was one Zukofsky knew impeccably well. Formidable critical narratives exist that explore Objectivism's linguistic materiality. Such accounts point out that Zukofsky's insistence on the "poem as an object" paves the way for later twentieth-century and twenty-first-century poetics. These postmodern materialist poetics focus on the texture and sonic qualities of language in protest against the reproduction of normative subjectivity by unconscious regimes of now naturalized semiotics.[32] Still others will understand Objectivism as part of a larger modernist will to

emphasize the poem itself as an "object."[33] In proposing a strong alignment of Objectivism with the commodity form and the Marxist theories that sought its explication and abolition, I seek to add to a critical discussion that has thus far emphasized the philological and empirical dimensions of Objectivism's Object-hood. By some contrast, this study emphasizes Objectivism's subtle understanding of the world of objects not simply as mystified, but as informed structurally by the assignation of value to the realm of exchange. To this end, Objectivism's contribution to political poetics is pedagogical rather than propagandistic; its formal practices encourage the acquisition of a counterfetishistic literacy. Such literacy is the practiced skill of a subject dually committed to investigating alternatives to ideologies in the service of things as they are, and why and how such ideologies assume the forms that they do. Objectivism's formal intensities index a semiotic materiality indeed; a semiotics of form quickened by a provisional deposal of the commodity's reign.

Objectivism's deep incorporation of the critique of the commodity form contributed to its supersession of first-generation modernism's formal antinomies. Such materialist commitments inoculated Objectivism against Imagism's latent empiricism; no lay scholar of the commodity form could imagine that particulars might be stripped of their ideological nimbi. As we will explore in greater detail, in 1935 Zukofsky engaged Pound in a brief series of epistolary debates over what constituted a commodity. Against Pound's claim that labor was an immaterial abstraction, Zukofsky argued, after Marx, that labor was a material commodity to be bought and sold like any other. This debate, which portended the two poets' increasingly divergent ideological and aesthetic positions, represented at minimum Objectivism's diagnosis of pure abstraction as a symptom of a consciousness unaware of the commodity's effects on available forms of knowledge. In place of such abstractions, Objectivism explores the connective tissue between words and the objects that they name, and in doing so, it discovers that when poetic form discloses social content, language is structured much like the commodity.

There is no question that Objectivism, as part of the continued success of reforming "modernism" to reflect an ideal representative democracy comprised of infinite identities, will continue to enjoy an increasing presence in anthologies and surveys of modern poetry. What is under question, however, is what *kind* of Objectivism that institutionalization will permit. I have been demonstrating the centrality of the commodity form to the formal

interventions and the politics that contour Objectivism's genealogical placement within the history of modernism. In doing so, I am positing that Objectivists' formal metabolization of commodity fetishism and its analysis, arguably the twentieth century's most radical account of the arrangement of the material world, is as important to an understanding of their positionality within the currents of modernism as are the identities these poets worked painfully to construct on the margins of society.[34]

Concept III: Mediation

Writing from these margins, Objectivists possessed a keen sense of social parallax, an awareness that the world required an approach of patient indirection. Our third concept, mediation, aids us in recovering this aesthetic indirection. In its broadest sense, mediation is the intervening process by which subjects interact with a world whose constitution precedes them. For Marx, labor is the primary mediation between the subject and its world. The separation of the laborer from her own tools that accompanies the structuring dispossessions of emergent capitalism effectively "socializes" labor as a mediation because individual laborers cannot contest nature as individuals, but rather as groups arranged in centers of mass production. This separation takes place alongside the rise of other universalizing social mediations: the rule of exchange by whatever general equivalent (usually the money form) the state authorizes; and, of course, the commodity form's spreading colonization of the world. The mediations of Objectivism's historical moment were legion, encompassing those listed above and more. Objectivists, like all social actors, found their perception and making of the world mediated not only by the intercession of obfuscatory lenses but also by other historically younger, emergent mediations—including the media and culture organs of both capitalist and anticapitalist interests. Objectivists aimed at the discovery and disclosure of not only these mediations through which its works manage to emerge but also the ways in which the poems they produce are themselves remediations of the social world.

What are the formal strategies through which these works achieve their disclosures? To answer this question, we must call upon concepts of recent acquaintance: combined and uneven development and the commodity form. To review the discussion thus far: Objectivist poetics formally embody combined and uneven developments within and between nations and regions through the paratactical presentation of diverse historical particulars.

These unexpected adjacencies reveal to the sensitive reader the copresence of the multiple developmental situations that comprise the capitalist terrain. Through their presentations of this Depression-era unevenness, Objectivists create works that stitch together patchy and provisional textual landscapes. The economic and political crisis of the 1930s not only threw into relief the contradictory geography of American developmental patterns; it also revealed as compromised the patina of the commodity, whose circulation, and ubiquity, was increasing in inverse proportion to corporate capitalism's declining rate of profit. Objectivism's key concerns—an aesthetics born of the analysis and negation of the commodity form; and the textual registration of a spatial logic of combined and uneven cultural, political and economic geographies—can be understood as cellular units within the most capacious of our concepts thus far: mediation.

Zukofsky's defining manifesto of Objectivism, "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," explores how Objectivism centers its poetic energies on the mediations that simultaneously precede and structure acts of representation. In defining "An Objective," Zukofsky famously invokes the visual register: "An Objective: (Optics)—The lens bringing the rays from an object to a focus. That which is aimed at."[35] This definition echolocates chapter 3, section 4 of *Capital*, where Marx also uses the image of the transmission of light from the object to the eye as a means to describe the ways in which commodity fetishism substitutes relations between people with relations between things in the eyes of the beholder. As we have seen, Objectivism, despite the appearance of its name, is less interested in objects or even the perceivable data of the material world, than it is in the forms these objects take and the paths by which they travel, mediated, to become available to our perception. Objectivist poems, in short, assign themselves a task both fantastically utopian and rigorously materialist: to render poetically these subvisible "rays" that thread the object to its perceiver. In this sense, Objectivism tenuously occupies that interstitial space in which the object assumes a form available to knowledge. This space is not properly phenomenological, but rather pre-perceptive; formally it is located *in the parataxis*, in that typographical gap between the geographical particulars the poems map. For example, in the movement from one poem to the next in Oppen's *Discrete Series*, the space between each poem is an opportunity to inhabit the moment in which each preceding scene or artifact mediates the next. Or: when we leap from the first to the second world in *"A,"* the breath that intercedes

between hemispheres is also a chance to aspirate the historical becoming of new geographies, brought to light against the aggressions—and solidarities—of its neighbor-in-text.

Objectivism not only formally embodies the processes of mediation, but its works count themselves among the many mediations they survey. As a current within revolutionary modernism, Objectivism transforms first-generation modernism's hallmark politically non-aligned self-reflexivity into what chapter 5 explores under the name of "critical self reflection." For example, Zukofsky's "To my wash-stand" stages the moment that the subject comes to understand himself, like the uneven world around him, as a mediation of history. For the Objectivist, critical self-reflection is the necessary overture to the convocation of an anticapitalist subject. Such reflection requires the positioning of both body and consciousness in history. It is thusly no coincidence that Zukofsky stages the moment of recognizing himself as part of the data of the material world while he is performing his domestic ablutions at the washstand, or that Niedecker's experiments in the syntax of consciousness happen to take her own process of emerging into wakeful embodiment as their object of inquiry.

In the field of aesthetics, mediation's critical arc might be drawn by reference to the works of György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Theodor Adorno, Louis Althusser, and Fredric Jameson. This introduction will not redact the subtleties and polemics that have characterized an already well-documented century of materialist contributions to the theory of mediation.[36] However, I would like to briefly reassert the utility of mediation as an aesthetic analytic; an analytic whose critical richness should be of special interest to scholars of modernist poetics. Anglo-American modernism is oft characterized by the strategies that it develops to protest the reification of language: defamiliarization, montage, impersonality; a formal insistence on the materiality of the text; the appeal to and of collectives both public and coterie that restore sociality to creative labor; and so on and so on. Objectivists map the capillary actions through which the world mediates and is mediated by subjects' senses and intellect. In doing so, they deliver a text willful in its resistance to such processes of reification. If the reification of language produces the appearance of discourse as autochthonous and unspun from its living relation to the social body, then it is the Objectivist project to deliberately encode mediation, the connective tissue that restores to systems of representation their dual powers in conditioning and articulating agency. However, Objectivism's politics reached beyond

restoration. As an avant-garde tendency within an increasingly broad cultural left committed to agitation and propaganda with whom it shared a committed interest in theorizing how art might both speak to—and help produce—an increasingly revolutionary public, Objectivism was interested in exploring mediation as a crucial element of radical pedagogy. As such, its works stage subjects both collective and individual acquiring knowledge not only of the world (as Oppen would insist) "with which one shares the century" as a graspable mediation but also of themselves, too, as prismatic, historically shifting mediations of a revolutionary era.

Précis of This Book

In chapter 1, I explore the politics of Zukofsky's Objectivist forms. To this end, textual analyses chart the poetic compression of historically distinct images, events, and persons that register the uneven social, economic, and political developments in capitalism's highly differentiated geographies. These arrangements are instances of "radical parataxis." Popular and critical narratives of modernism have tended to cite its fragmented forms as emblematic of the dislocated disunities of modernity. By some contrast, in Zukofsky's modernism we find particulars that at first appear unrelated, assembled in such a way that they encode the fraught unity of capitalism's vexing asymmetries. The political-economic concept of uneven development, I contend, provides a powerful foundation from which to explore the variegated landscape in and against which revolutionary modernism develops these formal strategies. Close readings of *"A"*—6 and *"A"*—8 explore how Zukofsky uses parataxis to craft a poetics of uneven historical transformations and spatial movements. These poetics capture formally the ways in which American legacies of colonization and exploitation continue to resonate and echo throughout the twentieth century, and in different parts of the globe.

I begin with a study of selections from *"A"*—8. Here, Zukofsky recreates and poetically encodes the transnational foundations of the American eighteenth-century mercantilist economy from the perspective of a crisis-ridden Depression-era present. From this perspective, moreover, *"A"*—8 connects the complex dynamics of nation-formation with the transnational migrations of labor. If, as Marx diagnosed, the temporalities of capitalist expansion seem to "annihilate space," then it is the Objectivist's project to restore it to visibility. To illustrate, the Chapter turns to the spatial and historical dynamic explored in series of imagined letters throughout *"A"*—8.

Each one is written by an author in a place and time pivotal to the understanding of the spaces of Empire: Marx writes from London; a dead soldier sends a letter to the New York Times after WWI; and, in the wake of the 1928 Revolution, a Chinese book editor rejects Zukofsky's own manuscript. I ground this analysis of restoring spatiality to the dizzying simultaneity of global happenings in a return to *"A"*—6," where Zukofsky offers the reader transpacific compressions of revolutionary China and capitalist urbanization in Chinatown, San Francisco. Here I cultivate uneven development as a literary critical analytic as it attends to Objectivism's registration of developmental asymmetry both between and within the nation states.

In chapter 2, I read George Oppen's 1934 collection *Discrete Series* as, among other things, a poetic counterpart to modernist avant-garde cinema. *Discrete Series* was Oppen's last poetic endeavor before he took a twenty-five year hiatus from writing poetry, a hiatus commencing with becoming an organizer in Communist and progressive social movements. Oppen wrote *Discrete Series* in part, as a formal parallel to his experience of riding the New York City subway for the first time; the poem's form approximates the experience of "serially" surveying "discrete" scenes and images in the contradictory spatial landscapes of 1930s New York. Individually, the poems of *Discrete Series* draw on an array of literary forms in play at the opening of the twentieth century: late Realism and early Imagism. More than this, taken in series, the poems critically mirror the rise of Anglo-American modernism's radical poetic forms, even as they write that very trajectory anew. This new trajectory is markedly cinematic: *Discrete Series* invests the images of Imagism with a paratactic, cinematic structure that finds common cause with Zukofsky's radical parataxis. Oppen's vertically articulated cityscapes compare solidaristically to the work of early Russian avant-garde filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov. For example, in the poem "White, From the," a Kino-eye moves from beneath the sidewalks, unearthing the particulars and aesthetic forms of a pre-capitalist American landscape, then ascending to explore the "limited alternatives" offered by a skyscraper's elevator. As geographically energized close readings demonstrate, the poems' depiction of the simultaneity of fragmentation and totalization in capitalist culture has strong affinities with Lefebvre's account of modernity's concurrently "fractured and homogenized" spaces.

Discrete Series concerns itself not only with the city, but also with that other space Harvey and Smith remind us is just as transformed by capitalist development: "nature." Poems such as "Party on Shipboard," "Bolt," and "The

Mast" take place on seascapes, exploring the ways in which the trope and fact of the ocean is, too, structured by capitalist crisis, inequality, and a perceptual life regrettably trained under the myopia of commodity fetishism. Like the upwardly rising city, the ocean deeply standing reveals a vertical analytic, and in turn, an opportunity to explore the sedimentations and concurrences of historical development that structure even and especially our perceptions of the "natural" world. I conclude the chapter with a focus on the latter project, showing how Oppen's contradictory employment of figures of women as formal indices of cultural developments and aesthetic practices defines the ideological limits of his pathbreaking experimental project.

In chapter 3, I contend that Zukofsky's elaboration of a poetics critical of the commodity form marks a definitive break with earlier modernist movements, and an establishment of materialist trajectory within American poetics. I begin with an analysis of the 1935 epistolary debate between Pound and Zukofsky regarding the nature of the commodity. In this exchange, Pound insists that labor cannot be a commodity because it is an abstraction. He accuses Zukofsky of imprecise language—"I suppose it comes from being a damned foreigner and not having bothered to learn english"—and explains his belief that labor is immaterial: "the workman can't store it/it is not a product, that he can put on the shelf for a month." For Pound, the commodity, like all of language, must find its adequation in solid objects. For Zukofsky, the form taken by the commodity—its apparent existence as an object outside of the social relations that produced it—is precisely what causes Pound to fetishize its surface of materiality. I argue that this debate crystallizes the ideological and formal split between Poundian, first-generation, and Objectivist, second-generation, modernism. In readings of these Pound/Zukofsky letters, and of *"A"*—9, we see how Zukofsky articulates, and crafts, a poetics informed by an account of the commodity form and what Marx called its "secrets." In *"A"*—9, Zukofsky writes stanzas in canzone form, the collective voices of which are commodities themselves, which protest at one point that "hands, heart, not value made us." These stanzas are an elaborate poetic enactment of Marx's claim that commodity fetishism is the secret that commodities would disclose "if they could speak." In poetic compressions of selections from *Capital* into the labor-intensive intentional archaicism of the canzone form, the speaking commodities narrate the scene of their emergence in the structural violence of exploitation. Just as the commodities reveal their historical origins in alienated labor, Zukofsky's canzones

draw our attention to the labor invested in them by a poet mindful of literature as cultural work. Detailed close readings of the canzone's stanzas trace Zukofsky's materialist supersession of first-generation modernism's commitment to impersonal voice. When the commodity speaks in *"A"*—9, its impersonal tone indexes its remove from the hands of its producers. As the poem restores an origin in labor to the commodity, its voice becomes increasingly given over to sentiments both melancholic and revolutionary-enthusiastic. I conclude that the decoding of the commodity form and the exfoliation of its contents prepares the reader for the transformative literacy required not only to read such ornate modernist experiments, but to decipher an object world structured by fetishism.

In chapter 4, I explore works from Lorine Niedecker's early surrealist period, a rarely visited corner of her oeuvre. I argue that Niedecker at once participates in a Zukofskian-centered Objectivist tradition and the transatlantic surrealist feminist movement flourishing in the 1920s and 1930s. Niedecker's location in Wisconsin meant that her access to the living avant-garde was almost entirely mediated by sustained epistolary engagements, or through often-belated encounters with transatlantic surrealist coteries and small journals. In response to this situation, Niedecker's work develops an avant-garde poetics that both plays on and is rooted in the asymmetric capitalist relations between country and city. Niedecker replaces the folksy countryside with a much more historically specific landscape of simultaneously modern and residual formations. For example, in her experimental triptych "Beyond What," "factories and hills" combine to create the terrain of fantasy life. In all of Niedecker's surrealist triptychs, we find that consciousness is as uneven as the world that it arranges.

I engage extensively with the two longest works from Niedecker's surrealist period—*Progression* (1933) and *Next Year or I Fly My Rounds Tempestuous* (1935). In the poems of *Progression*, Niedecker moves from a concern for externals, progressing inward to explore the subject's difficult liberation, a liberation born redemptively from the failure of its psychic integration into a hostile world of commodities and reified historical particulars. *Progression* invites us to rethink the gendered alignment of interiority with retreat, and exteriority with advance. Instead, the work shows how the rendering of interiority discloses the material contours of subjectivity itself.

Niedecker's *Next Year* is composed of small rectangles of papers carefully pasted over the middle of twenty-seven pages of a 1935 devotional calendar, and gifted to Zukofsky on "Xmas" of 1934. The poems of *Next Year*, I argue,

combine an Objectivist's critique of narratives of temporal progress with surrealist poetic forms that emphasize the performance of gender and the defeatable tyranny of domestic life. Indeed, these poems further reveal Niedecker's hybridization of Objectivism and Surrealism. The marriage is productive: Niedecker remedies the Objectivist inattention to the material contours of the psychic topography. Her corrective draws dialectically on core Objectivist principles: a resistance to the territorialization of consciousness by the commodity form; the poetic treatment of the subject as a mediation of historical forces; and the formal documentation of the uneven structuring not only of world without but also, for Niedecker, of the world within.

In chapter 5, I outline an Objectivist aesthetics of political consciousness. My focus is on the ways in which Zukofsky reconceives the formal self-reflexivity characteristic of first-generation modernism into the basis for a second-generation modernist subject's mindful self-positioning in the historical streams of discursive development. In this specifically Objectivist reflexivity, the poet fashions his materials in the interests of fostering such historical subjectivity, and in doing so develops an aesthetics that points up individual subjects' embeddedness in collective and social histories. Objectivist reflexivity enjoins readers to situate themselves in relation to these histories, and to imagine themselves as potentially revolutionary agents of transformation. As a beneficiary of this expansive vision, the subject calibrates its agency with its determination by the historical world, thereby laying the foundation for social praxis. I analyze two of Zukofsky's poetry collections, *55 Poems* (1941) and *Anew* (1946), to argue that their contents formally embody this process of critical self-reflection.

Textual close readings begin with poem "11" from *Anew*, which concerns the transformation of former centers of industry into housing developments in the aftermath of the economic and social crises of the 1930s. Spoken in part in the voice of a Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrant, the poem explores how capitalism's developmental asymmetries are expressed in dialects specific to ethnicity and class. In "11," subjectivity is inextricable from the objects, commodities and built landscapes of its social context. This imbrication of subject and object is exemplified further in "To my wash-stand" and its companion piece "Further than the wash-stand." In these poems, a quotidian object, the "wash-stand," provides an imagined connection between the poet's private domestic ablutions and the simultaneous bathing practices of an unseen larger collective. The object-mediation provides the connective tissue necessary to the poet's solidarity with a broader

working class, even in times of their most individuated and private moments. In "Further than," the poem reflects upon *itself* as a mediation that links the poet to that vaster totality. For Objectivists, aesthetic self-reflexivity is the semiotic afterimage of the subject's apprehension of itself within a social and historical context.

The micropoem "What are these songs" explores further the art object as a prismatic bond between the individual subject and an alienated world. The poem introduces an impossibly compressed account of the relationship between art and subjective agency. In this account, "songs" achieve social meaning through their capacity to produce the very readerly subject they require for admission into discursive life. A turn to the longer poem "Glad they were there" supplements this account of the poetic embodiment of the subject's freedom within the world. I complete chapter 5 with an analysis, concerned with the development of critical self-reflection, of Zukofsky's sestina "Mantis." This, perhaps the most recognizable to a wider readership of Zukofsky's works, stages a fraught meeting between the poet and the eponymous insect. This confrontation allows the poet to explore the relationship between the revolutionary avant-gardist and popular life. Neither engaging in the hortative of direct propaganda, nor retreating to the realms of areferentiality, Zukofsky instead exhorts the mantis to become a symbolic contact point: between the poet and the working class, and between collective action and revolutionary possibility. The revolutionary potential of the mantis can only be activated when poet and proletariat surrender themselves together to the revolutionary process, transforming their "terrified chest[s]" into helipads for the mantis's transportive, liberatory flight.

1 Zukofsky
The Political Economy of Revolutionary Modernism

In the fields of modern and contemporary poetics in particular and cultural studies in general, recent scholarship has turned to world systems theory and critical geography to situate questions of culture in a global matrix. Increasingly, literary theorists and scholars are deploying the social-scientific concepts of center, margin, core, periphery, and uneven development in order to problematize critical commonplaces regarding the trajectories of "dissemination" of literary forms from the polis of empire to the countryside of the neocolony.[1] Building on this turn, I analyze the political geographies of Louis Zukofsky's early-twentieth-century Objectivist poetics as exemplary of what I will call here revolutionary American modernism, one characterized, in large part, by its anticapitalism and aggressive formal experimentation. I explore the ways in which Objectivist poetry elaborates in aesthetic terms the economic and social concepts of twentieth- and twenty-first-century political economists of uneven development—an arc that extends from Leon Trotsky to David Harvey, and comprises a diverse, interdisciplinary tradition of thought.[2] Readers will find Zukofsky situated within this political-economic arc, and his confrontation with capitalism's differential tectonics in the early decades of the twentieth century reenacted.

Allow this passage from *"A"*—8 to introduce the key concepts of the discussions that follow:

> Railways and highways have tied
> Blood of farmland and town
> And the chains
> Speed wheat to machine
> This is May
> The poor's armies veining the earth!

Hirers once fed by the harried
Cannot feed them their hire
    Nor the chains
    Hold the hungry in
This is May
The poor are veining the earth!

Light lights in air blossoms red
Like nothing on earth
  Now the chains
  Drag graves to lie in
This is May
The poor's armies veining the earth.

March
From hirer unchained
    Till your gain
    Be the
World's[3]

This passage offers a complex expansion and rearrangement of a poem that Zukofsky had originally published in a May 1938 *New Masses* under the title of "March Comrades" ("Words for a Workers' Chorus from *'A'*—8," discussed in greater detail in chapter 5). The stanzas quoted above propose a poetics of revolutionary transformation informed by a Depression-era geography of unified unevenness in which "railways and highways have tied / Blood of farmland and town." The chains that suture city to country are those from which the poor must emancipate themselves; they are also the very things that will dig the grave of the system itself, when "chains / drag graves to lie in." Here the Communist language of chains that the working class must lose appears in an expanded role, referring, too, to the geographic interdependences that compel production itself. The passage inspires the question: how and why do spatial articulations of economic development texture Objectivism's literary landscape?

Against the literary-critical view of modernity and poetic modernism as marked by fragmentation and dissolution (a view that follows the ideological-aesthetic perspective inaugurated by Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot), we will find that Objectivists understand their modernity as a vast but increasingly integrated aggregate of cultural developments and particulars. What I will

be calling a poetics of uneven development is an aesthetic registration of such a landscape.[4] The poetics of uneven development reveals that what seem to be the fragmented forms of a dissolving unity are, for the Objectivist, differentiations within a social world rendered legible by a relational intaglio of paratactical comparison. As the argument will reveal in detail below, this poetics is Objectivism's key strategy for mapping Depression-era geographies of capitalism in crisis. Zukofsky's comparative methodology fuses aesthetic and political economic approaches, yoking together seemingly distant objects and events through the chief formal strategy of parataxis. So, we find in Zukofsky's *"A,"* for example, New York in 1648 cohabits with a late-Victorian Henry Adams. Or, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and the Russian Revolution interilluminate each other through their compressed adjacency. Such paratactical adjacency registers not only Zukofsky's capacious understanding of history but, as importantly, capitalism's production of differentially developed zones and geographies.

Parataxis enjoys a long history in scholarly studies of modernism. In Adorno's masterful retrieval of Hölderlin's poetry from its celebration by the fascists, parataxis is that formal technique that allows the poet to "attack syntax syntactically."[5] Paratactical strategies permit the emergence of an aesthetic "unity that knows itself to be inconclusive" and generate precisely the kind of self- knowledge incommensurate with fascist politics.[6] For the poststructuralist critic too, parataxis is an aesthetic good, even if its target is not the Reich but the less specific field of "linearity." Peter Quartermain writes that paratactic structures "*suspend* linearity, for they muster data whose relations one to another are not specifically stated" and offer "a field . . . for the reader to wander at will" where the author has abdicated his authority to impose meaning.[7] In a broadening of the critical potentials of parataxis, transnationalist scholar Susan Stanford Friedman calls for a reading strategy that incorporates "cultural parataxis." Such a hermeneutic honors the comparativism that inheres in paratactical forms, to examine the "*conjuncture* of writers, looking for the multiplicity of identities, traditions and locales that once set in relation to one another can produce insights otherwise not visible."[8] Cultural parataxis, Friedman argues, "assumes the necessity of a spatial orientation."[9] This study of Zukofsky's parataxis is as much a response to Friedman's call to respatialize parataxis as it is a return to Adorno's dialectical point that parataxis points up not just fissures but also unities. Like Quartermain, I too wish for the reader to "wander at will" in Zukofsky's work; when parataxis is understood as the transcoding of an

orchestra of spatial, cultural, and political developments, the reader's peripatetic textual treks map out deep, spatialized histories, the knowledge of which, after all, is part of any truly emancipatory trespass.

In the service of such knowledges, Marx completed the conceptual antecedent to Zukofsky's formal comparisons of uneven developments seventy-three years before Objectivism was born. Because Zukofsky possessed a deep textual knowledge of Marx, critical responsibility to the intertextual fabric of the poet's Objectivist work recommends a brief detour via Marx's method. In the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx locates the roots of the dialectical approach to cultural analysis in historical comparison. Through their comparison, entities that have the appearance of natural, continuous relation (for example, money and property) confess their historical situatedness. Marx argues that in spite of their appearance of concrete immediacy, things like money are "concrete because (they have) the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse."[10] Marx inverts the usual understanding of concreteness; it is not a physical property of an object, but the way that we perceive that object's many, "diverse" social histories. These accumulated histories can never be mined from an object standing in solitude; their excavation requires the comparison of an object with others, both past and present. The following passage suggests that this comparative method can excavate the past of a particular form or object, while also revealing the contradictions specific to this form's historical present:

> Money may exist, and did exist historically, before capital existed, before banks existed, before wage labor existed, etc. Thus in this respect it may be said that a simpler category can express the dominant relations of a less developed whole, or else those subordinate relations of a more developed whole which already had a historic existence before the whole developed in the direction expressed by a more concrete category. To that extent the path of abstract thought, rising from the simple to the combined, would correspond to the real historical process.[11]

In Marx's model of differentiated historical development, emergent cultural categories index proleptically the "dominant relations" not directly observable in the present. Yet, like the mystified immediacy of the commodity form, the cultural categories' forms of appearance obscure their own historical specificity. The comparative method throws this specificity into relief by revealing the hidden historical content within forms, such as money, that only appear immune to changes in the mode of production. Money, in Marx's account, reveals the concreteness of its particular form

only when it is contextualized within the history of its own development. This passage assigns the uneven developments of history a prophetic role: less "developed" cultural categories can best express the contradictions within, and expose the constructedness of, more "developed" or reified cultural categories. We are now poised to return to Zukofsky's Objectivism, which arises from the political energies generated by the rough adjacencies such comparisons produce.

The Objectivist Program

Zukofsky's epigrammatic overture to the paramanifesto "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" is perhaps the most often visited self-description of Objectivism as a movement. Introduced to *Poetry* magazine editor Harriet Monroe by Pound, Zukofsky guest edited the February 1931 issue; in addition to "Program," Zukofsky included works by Oppen, Basil Bunting, William Carlos Williams, and others. "Program" powerfully encapsulates the way in which Marx's comparative methodology proves generative to Zukofsky's account of Objectivism's poetic forms. And, of course, the "Program" offers an introductory framework for aesthetic and political concerns of early *"A"*:

> *An Objective: (Optics)—The lens bringing the rays from an object to a focus. (Military use—That which is aimed at. (Use extended to poetry)—Desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars.*
>
> It is understood that historic and contemporary particulars may mean a thing or things as well as an event or a chain of events: i.e., an Egyptian pulled-glass bottle in the shape of a fish or oak leaves, as well as the performance of Bach's *Matthew Passion* in Leipzig, or the Russian revolution and the rise of metallurgical plants in Siberia.[12]

The manifesto's "aim" is to dramatize the political investments and aesthetic forms that inhere in Objectivism's works. The military language introduces the idea that Objectivists are those who not only represent "historic and contemporary particulars" but who do so with a collective, progressive, political intentionality that resembles a partisan affiliation more than a modernist coterie.

The examples assembled by Zukofsky attest to the periods and particulars that stipple Objectivism's historical sensibility. Marianne Moore's "An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish"; Bach's *Passion*; rapid industrialization of Russia immediately following the 1917 revolution—Zukofsky's allusive/referential reach is vast, and not necessarily limited to the modern

period. The series of particulars reflects an Objectivist preoccupation with transitional and interstitial historical developments. At first glance, the juxtaposition might resemble an Eliotic assemblage, or even a Poundian collage of endorsed (or worse, undesirable) events and arts. In Eliot's and Pound's aesthetics, however, examples are truly "exemplary," earning the endorsements or condemnations of the poet-ethicist. Against such ethical exemplarity, the particulars that energize the Objectivist sensibility find common cause not as vehicles of cultural capital but rather as historical indices of cultural and political transformation. The frictions that occur between the old and the new in these transitional moments are not only the conditions of possibility for Zukofsky's counterhegemonic modernism but also the central concern of the poetics themselves.

Zukofsky's allusion to the performance of Bach's *Passion* in Leipzig announces virtuosity as an artistic phenomenon that invites us to challenge the uniformity of any one historical moment. Remarking on the nature of Bach's work, Adorno argues that it is the very anachronistic character of Bach's compositions that "becomes a harbinger of things to come."[13] Perhaps unexpectedly, it is Bach's strategic deployment of pre-capitalist musical forms—what Adorno reads as Bach's so-called formalist archaicism—that testifies to a resistant utopian impulse specific to modernity.[14] The *Passion* is a structuring motif throughout the early sections of *"A."* Its massive, multivocal formal structure and dizzying collection of dominant, emergent, and residual aesthetic forms makes it particularly suited to the poetics of uneven development.

The final two linked particulars, the Russian revolution and the rise of metallurgical plants in Siberia, allude to one of the historical contexts of Objectivism's emergence. The 1917 Revolution was symptomatic of what the Objectivists saw as modernity's multiple temporalities. Functioning as a kind of twentieth-century Copernican revolution, it proposed a differently centered globe in which core nations might be viewed in parallax from the position of counterhegemonic peripheral regions. In this way, the Russian Revolution threw into relief for a broad left an American political life whose claims to the unmediated liberal principles of evenly developing equalities and freedoms were experiencing a Depression-era crisis of legitimacy. Throughout early *"A,"* we find paratactical adjacencies that explore the ways in which unevenness and revolution in the global periphery illuminated a correlative unevenness in the national interior of the United States. Consider, for example, the following from *"A"*—6:

The time was:
12 years after Ilytch's statement
When the collectivists
Raised the great metallurgical plants
In Siberia,
For a people's idea,
As well as their practice;
Tariffs;
The U.S.A. embargo
On pulp-wood from Russia,
Tho the U.S.A. needed the pulp-wood.
If there must be nations, why not
Make it clear they're for business?

"We've got to find new uses for wheat," said Henry;
The time was when its shipment would
Have done good to Ivan
still waiting for his tractor —
Kulak unable to see that there was any
Good in anything without any money.[15]

In this passage, we find the appearance of the "Program"'s metallurgical plants. These plants, appropriately so-named for their utopian sublation of the opposition between nature and industry, provide an architectural instance of the very process of objectification. Zukofsky refers later in the "Program" to successful objectification as "arrangement, into one unit, of minor units of sincerity—in other words, the resolving of words and their ideation into a structure."[16] In similar fashion, the collectivists' plants merge idea and practice in the epicenters of socialized production. In contrast to the passage's internationalism, we find the "U.S.A." establishing tariffs to hinder the economic development of postrevolutionary Russia, tariffs in direct opposition to the immediate needs of the national economic body, which "needed the pulp-wood."[17] Imperial protectionism dams both import and export; Henry Ford's desire to find new nonfood commercial uses for wheat reads as obscene in the global context of both Depression-era food insecurity within the United States and a technologically underdeveloped Russia, where metallurgical plants were not yet forging tractors for cultivation. Like Ford, the landed peasantry ("Kulak") are less interested in the use than the exchange value of the goods they produce; they are "unable to see

that there was any/Good in anything without money." Textual adjacency points up unsentimentally surprising ideological similarities between the scions of capitalist production and these precapitalist agriculturalists. However, this adjacency also shocks, its unexpectedness pointing up the geopolitical asymmetries between distant and opposing social actors. These meridian hemispheres, it turns out, are at once interdependent *and* isolated, and we are left to conclude, with the hungry, that unequal development between core and periphery is deeply bound to uneven development within the core itself. Poverty is both concrete and spiritual, as the passage continues, demanding both:

> Alfalfa for our horses,
> The time for hitch-hikers across country
> (Summertime).
> New York, and then desolation.
> The steel works of Gary.
> At Lake Michigan in Chicago,
> Left a note he was going to Berkeley.
> Desolation. Brush. Foothills of the Rockies.
> A roof, like a green sea, of a desert shack in Nevada,
> 120 degrees in the shade—
> Far away in the heat the monument of
> a city.[18]

The passage's shift to the American interior shouldn't surprise. Responsively sensitive to the social and economic variegations of revolutionary and crisis-fractured landscapes, Zukofsky narrates moments from his 1930 road trip across the United States that combine to screen an American modernity united in its geographical developments and de-developments. New York gives way to "desolation," only to meet with those other metallurgical plants—this time in Gary, Indiana. (Zukofsky, like most progressive cultural workers of this period, would have been well aware that Gary was the site of the famous steel strike of 1919, which was handily defeated through the industrialists' alembic of inflaming racial tensions and anti-Communist sentiment.). The volte of the passage offers a parallax view of the "city." When we depart from "NYC" we find a "desolate" periphery; now we observe the "monument of a city" from the oasis ("green sea") of Nevada's desert shacks. An ambiguous genitive ("of a city") destabilizes—and typographically offsets—the historical primacy of the metropolis. Does the city possess a monument,

or is the city itself a monument, projecting its self-narration over a periphery upon whose imputed perceptions it must depend for its cohesion within region and history? In this passage, and throughout the early sections of *"A"* explored in the following pages, Zukofsky's American geography transcodes a globe bound together by discongruity.

For Objectivist Zukofsky, the experience of 1917 is not an exceptional rupture but a historical beginning. As I began by noting, the poetic forms of canonical modernism are popularly received as registering alienation and fragmentation. In some contrast, Objectivism reads fracture as the contradictory tensions between capital's dual tendencies. These tendencies are toward, on the one hand, rapidly proliferating and wildly diverse "spatial fixes"—as David Harvey would have it—and, on the other, a relentless and homogenous territorialization of the global life-world. Harvey describes the spatial fix, which does more to redouble than remedy capitalist crises:

> The frontiers of [a] region can be rolled back or relief gained by exports of money capital, commodities or productive capacities or imports of fresh labour powers from other regions. The tendency towards overaccumulation remains unchecked, but devaluation is avoided by successive and ever grander "outer transformations." This process can presumably continue until all external possibilities are exhausted or because other regions resist being treated as mere convenient appendages. . . . The geography of uneven development helps convert the crisis tendencies of capitalism into compensating regional configurations of rapid accumulation and devaluation.[19]

In the global core and its peripheries, the 1920s and '30s saw regions and peoples who indeed resisted "being treated as mere appendages." Harvey here emphasizes the ways in which capitalist dispossession—and the resistance to it—produces differentiated, regionalized spaces, which are bound irrevocably to the fates of each other. The Russian convergence of not less than three temporalities, articulated in the pressurized, conflicting interregional spaces of the national body—revolution, counterrevolution, and the feudal past—made legible to Objectivists that seemingly disparate social phenomena are collectively underwritten by the interlocking and uneven action of capitalist and precapitalist cultures. And through the prismatic lens of the Russian Revolution, these revolutionary modernists would begin to lay bare uneven developments, not just in Russia but in the capitalist core as well.

Consider the words of turn-of-the-century French scientist and philoso-

pher Jules Henri Poincaré, which appear, selectively, later in *"A"*—8, where we find a compressed citation that just might crystallize Zukofsky's dialectical approach to the relation of any particular to its neighbors: "The facts are not strange to each other."[20] Drawn from Poincaré's 1903 *Science and Hypothesis*, the phrase pithily summarizes the scientist's longer argument,

> Two opposite tendencies may be distinguished in the history of the development of physics. On the one hand, new relations are continually being discovered between objects which seemed destined to remain forever unconnected; scattered facts cease to be strangers to each other and tend to be marshaled into an imposing synthesis. The march of science is towards unity and simplicity. On the other hand, new phenomena are continually being revealed; it will be long before they can be assigned their place—sometimes it may happen that to find them a place a corner of the edifice must be demolished. In the same way, we are continually perceiving details ever more varied in the phenomena we know, where our crude senses used to be unable to detect any lack of unity. What we thought to be simple becomes complex, and the march of science seems to be towards diversity and complication.[21]

Often drawing on the registers of space or mathematics, the early sections of *"A"* seek to establish, and at times restore, connective tissue between facts that appear as unrelated, unaffiliated fragments. The poem screens those moments in which "the corner of the edifice must be demolished": when new spatial and social phenomena are unpeeled daily by a global orchestra of strained and interdependent adjacencies. When revolution erupts in a place least prepared by history, and crisis racks a nation at the rising crest of its ability to produce for all, Zukofsky responds by constructing a poetics responsible to events exfoliated, unevenly, by historical rupture.

Trotsky / Zukofsky: Revolutionary Political Economy and the American Avant-Garde

Marxism and its political practice, as we have seen, furnish key conceptual and historical coordinates for the study of Zukofsky's Objectivism. Consider, as a historical nexus of Marxist philosophy and political action, the critical interventions of Zukofsky's contemporary Leon Trotsky. Trotsky's theory of combined and uneven development seeks to account for the dynamic of uneven development both within and between national / statist entities. Trotsky elaborated this theory in the pages of his essay "Permanent Revolution," published in 1931, the same year as "Program: 'Objectivists.'"

Trotsky's essay contains a considered polemic against the Communist International's increasingly stagist political position that pre-Communist nations must necessarily proceed through the various forms of modified capitalist social and economic periods before finally socializing the means of production in Communist fashion.

In stark contrast, Trotsky describes a globe comprised of an almost infinite number of irrefutably interdependent "stages," and in this brew of territorial and social contradiction developmental advance and immiseration are equal possibilities as the "combinations" resulting from capitalist globalization intensify. The political upshot of Trotsky's negation of the stagist narrative of linear historical time accords an unexpected agency to the periphery's small but emergent working class. Given a globe riven with combined and uneven developments, this collective subject did not need to marinate in a preparatory bath of historical stages but might rather exploit the unevenness of this contradictory terrain by advancing revolutionary transformation in the present. Trotsky called this theory one of "permanent revolution."

I suggest that Objectivism's paratactical poesis is a vibrant textual mural of permanent revolution, or, put another way, that permanent revolution is the political/praxical counterpart to Objectivism's parataxis. The contemporaneous models share with one another a critique of so-called progress and a commitment to an analytic practice rooted in the coexistence of developmental variances. Marx famously describes the contours of modern capitalism's temporal-spatiality as the apparent result of the "annihilation of space by time," wherein capital deploys "the means of communication and transport" to "drive beyond every spatial barrier."[22] Trotsky and Zukofsky, too, invite the compressions of history. The unexpected adjacencies appearing within their work defy the hypotactical distensions upon which stagist historical narratives rely. As I note in the introduction to this book, an invocation of Trotsky in a study of Objectivism does not imply that Objectivists deliberately adopted the model of combined and uneven development. Rather, to argue that Trotsky and Zukofsky are conceptual intimates is to point up the ways in which revolution and crisis in the first third of the twentieth century transnationally fertilized political imaginations that generated models of history thick with the shifting unities of multiple temporalities.

In the next section, we look closely at how Zukofsky counters received histories of unbroken, steady progress with poetic forms that arrange actors and events sourced from geographically and historically distant origins.

The paratactical poetics of *"A"* itself, to which we now return, develops the "Program"'s proposition that form is where transformation can be most readily recognized.

The Politics of Parataxis in *"A"*: Prismatic Microhistories of Indigeneity, Labor, and Migration

Parataxis, as I've suggested, is Objectivism's signature strategy. By raising parataxis to the level of structural, signifying logic, *"A"* delivers a jolt to readers beguiled by the naturalness of their historical present. Written over the course of almost fifty years, the first of *"A"*'s twenty-four sections appeared in 1928, the last in 1968, and the penultimate, *"A"*—23, as late as 1974. The epic poem's range is dizzying; its contents draw on an extremely broad conception of what constitutes recorded human history: from polyvocal operatic movements to the intonations of Lower East Side Yiddish; from the Russian Revolution to the war against Vietnam, *"A"* is a colossal record of Zukofsky's long century of utopian voracity. In keeping with our focus on Objectivism as a Depression-era modernism, we turn our attention to a section composed between 1935 and 1937. The "themes" of *"A"*—8 are legion, but a cursory roster might include: the ontology of labor; Soviets; American industry and economic crisis; the social history of artistic production, with a special focus on Bach; Marx and Marxism; Henry Adams and the ideological contours of nascent empire; the geographical dispersal of former early American craftwork sites in New York City; and workplace actions in rural and urban regions.

In the first section of interest to our investigation, Zukofsky raises the political stakes of paratactical structure with an allusive, immanent critique of bourgeois historicism:

> If the historian cares for his truths,
> he is certain to falsify his facts.
> Rapprochement with an aggressor is
> Like rapprochement of the lobster
> With the shark, the lobster hopes
> The shark will not eat it all,
> Only one claw.
> More difficult to a lobster is the casting of
> its shell
> Is the *vis inertia* of class history.

Till when labor will have ceased
To be a mere means of supporting life.
People: the most valuable of all capital.

1648. New York in Dutch times
Wages of Indians ordered to be paid
Without disputing their accounts

1655. All Jews are ordered to depart
From this place.[23]

Zukofsky begins with a modified citation from *The Education of Henry Adams*, whose philosophy of history was the subject of the poet's master's thesis at Columbia University: "The historian must not try to know what is truth, if he values his honesty; for, if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts."[24] Challenging the idea of an inexorable historical march, Adams argues that "the laws of history only repeat the lines of force or thought" (Zukofsky is only too happy to poach Adams's idealism in the interest of pursuing models of historical time not wedded to developmentalist progress narratives!). Adams further elaborates how "the child born in 1900 would, then, be born into a new world which would not be a unity but a multiple."[25] Adams brings together his account of modernity's post-centered, après-theological world with meditations on the epoch-shattering nature of physics' nonsensible facts: "lines of force or thought" are, in other words, facts that defy empirical observation but which are nonetheless empirically true. In Adams's hermeneutic, facts must be falsified—made strange, in the Brechtian sense—in order that their structuring conditions—or truths—can be made visible. In other words, facts can no longer signify belligerently; they must assume a difficult concord with the more capacious "honesties" of larger historical context.

Zukofsky is concerned with bad abstractions in this passage: not only that of "facts" but of capital's arbitrary algebras of equivalence. The passage's lobster-shell metaphor has its source in Marx's explanation of the logic which structures the price of the commodity and its exchange value. In *Capital,* Volume 1, Marx invokes the example of the lobster casting off its shell:

> Like the relative form of value in general, price expresses the value of a commodity (for instance a ton of iron) by asserting that a given quantity of the equivalent (for instance an ounce of gold) is directly exchangeable with iron. But it by no

> means asserts the converse, that iron is directly exchangeable for gold. In order, therefore, that a commodity may in practice operate effectively as exchange-value, it must divest itself of its natural physical body and become transformed from merely imaginary into real gold, although this act of transubstantiation may be more 'troublesome' for it than the transition from necessity to freedom for the Hegelian "concept," the casting of his shell for a lobster, or the putting-off of the old Adam for Saint Jerome.[26]

Insofar as the commodity is exchanged for gold, and the commodity is not gold, there is a real transubstantiation that occurs for the parties involved. In this sense, the process of transformation of the commodity is very real. However, the transformation of iron into gold is at the same time "imaginary," its super-"natural" appearance obscuring the labor power that underwrites all exchange. This whole transformation, Marx finishes, is less "possible" than the Hegelian synthesis, the lobster's exhausting molt, and spiritual cleanliness put together. Significantly, the lobster-shell metaphor appears within a series of comparisons. In a syntactical play on the very nature of exchange, the dialectic, the lobster, and St. Jerome are made formally equivalent by virtue of their individually and collectively analogous relationship to the iron. The examples also share an eventual freedom from necessity and material constraints; the dialectic consummates, the lobster sheds its shell, and St. Jerome exceeds an Adamic heritage. Yet despite their utopian quality, these exemplary transformations are still less fantastical than the seemingly objective processes of capital circulation and commodity exchange. Marx's observation applies recursively to Adams's epigrammatic wisdom. For both Marx and Adams, modernity's "real" "facts" have little to do with what Zukofsky might call sincerity and more to do with ideology and political economy.

After this detour through Marx has disabused the reader of the seeming neutrality of such abstractions, Zukofsky returns to Adams to rediscover him as unmindful of the very history to which he had demanded fidelity. Adams elaborates the term *vis inertia* in a section of the *Education* that crystallizes the prevalence of Spenglerian narratives in the historical discourses of modernity, whereby "High Cultures" rise, fall, and irresistibly rise again.[27] Adams uses Russia as an example of a country paralyzed by "race inertia" which presents, for him, a force resistant to "American intensity," or, more bluntly, American capitalism.[28] From *"A"*—8's post-1917 vantage point, Adams's characterization of Russia as "inert" flags the ideological and tem-

poral boundaries of his historiography. This reference to inertia also, and importantly, points up ironically the fault lines in contemporary assessments of Russia's backwardness, whose Occidentalist developmentalism Trotsky's theory of combined and uneven development would intervene against.

The movement of labor will soon disrupt the orderly march of imperialist history. An excerpt from Stalin in 1935, "people—the most valuable of all capital," precedes a paratactical lurch, on the other side of which begins, starkly, the timeline whose punctuated diachrony will structure much of *"A"*—8. Without warning, we find ourselves in 1648. Situating the reader in early America, the passage calls attention to the initial attempts to transform the indigenous American population into waged laborers: "Wages of Indians ordered to be paid." The seemingly universal practice of wages as compensation evokes first a sense of familiarity, only then to involve the reader in the process of making historical distinctions between the colonial period and her own modernity. The "Indian's" "wages" sets the stage for a determinate negation. The particular develops a homology between waged labor past and present, only to disrupt this transhistorical arc with an intervention from the indigenous American periphery. The waged "Indian" represents the historical emergence of the wage form in colonial America, and reveals indirectly, through its not-yet-naturalized difference, the unequal and hidden power relations behind the exchange of money for labor. The (italicized) eagerness displayed by the Dutch in entering into this relationship in turn offers further comment on the historical nature and purpose of the wage form. To a typical reader in the 1930s, the colonial desire to draw subjects into the wage relation would have appeared in startling contrast to Depression-era unemployment. Indeed, the employers of the 1930s were anything but eager to compensate workers and used the withholding and reduction of the wage as a method of social control. The parataxis of historical difference reveals the coercive origins of a wage form that was precariously naturalized in the 1930s by the ideology of consensual contract.

"1655" repeats history—with a difference. The year marks the first immigration of Jews from Portuguese-ruled Brazil into the American colonies. Peter Stuyvesant, acting in the interests of newly settled merchants in the colonies, ordered the Jews to leave. However, the Dutch West India Company, citing the importance of investments by Portuguese Jews, successfully petitioned the colonial administration for the immigrants to remain. The American rebuff of Jewish immigration contrasts starkly with the colonizers' fantasy of the Indians' easy integration. Again, peripheral and, in this case,

migrant rather than indigenous social formations disclose the colonial administration's racialized labor and economic regimes. The emphasis on Jewish exclusion, as opposed to Pound's and Eliot's preoccupations with imagined Jewish domination, speaks to Zukofsky's attempt not only to counter that increasingly dangerous idea with an alternative genealogy but also to complicate the stereotype of an undifferentiated Jewish itinerant merchant class by revealing its historical roots in exclusion.

Jewish-American immigrants—Zukofsky, recall, was the son of one—here have the semiotic status of historical indicators: their presence or (enforced) absence speaks to the existence of transitional cultural, economic, and political moments and the inequalities that attend those moments. In *"A"*—8, the migration of colonial power from the Global South (Brazil) to the Global North (the Colonies) indicates the first of the splits between colonial administration and European and British economies, and recursively reveals the racial contours of the earliest American class formations. Furthermore, *"A"*—8 explores the most mediated of social relations and histories—waged labors and the early American colony's exclusionist practices and its rhetoric of refuge—through the introduction and presence of a peripheral, unassimilated social grouping. In the form of the timeline, Zukofsky yokes uneven temporal and spatial developments, and the poetic proximity of 1648, 1655, and the (implied) 1930s delivers a comparative lesson about the uneven movements of global capital, a lesson in which the copresence of present and past simultaneously denaturalizes ideologies of racial inclusivity and the equability of the wage form.

Parataxis, then, coaxes the reader into the recognition of both similarity *and* difference between distant particulars made nearer, and remedies a state of consciousness "too tired to see differences":

> Friends too tired to see differences,
> This, Marx dissociated:
> "*Equal* right . . presupposes inequality,
> Different people are *not* equal to one another."
> But to make the exploitation by one man of many
> impossible!
> When the opposition between brain and manual work
> will have disappeared,
> When labor will have ceased to be a mere means of
> supporting life[29]

This passage draws from Lenin's *State and Revolution*, which in turn draws from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*. The lines leaven the hermeneutic of "difference" we have been tracing. The histories and geographies that converged to estrange waged labor and reveal the racial coordinates of labor regimes become legible to a readerly eye engaged in ongoing comparison. This comparative practice lubricates a healthy alienation from the patina of the present. This alienated subject belongs to a future ("When the opposition . . . will have disappeared") in which equality is not simply a liberal shibboleth purely formal in nature and difference will become "dissociated" from inequality.

The Annihilation of Space by Time: Transpacific Orients

The poetics of uneven development situates us at the contact points between the diachronic and synchronic axes of history. *"A"*—8's diachronic "timeline" supposes an unfolding of social life whose revolutionary transformation "will have" become part of the historical past. The synchronic excavation to which we now turn supposes a such a temporal *plus spatial* social landscape bodied forth in the critical mapping of transatlantic and hemispheric particulars.

"A"—6, written in 1930, explores the global political geographies in which such a subject might emerge. In a section that exemplifies the vast referential reach of *"A"* as a whole, Zukofsky derives his poetic materials from the social spaces of the American West Coast and moves, via a detour through China, to the mass cultural landscape of New York City. Moving transpacifically from West to East, Zukofsky charges his reader to reconsider the positions of China and the United States in the system of global capital. The spatial path of the poetic narrative establishes an important negation: where readers might think of China as "the east," *"A"*—6 launches from the West Coast across the Pacific, and China becomes wester than the West. The eventual return to New York completes the reversal of westward American expansionism. In this movement, the poem delivers a determinate negation in the most liberatory Adornoan sense: the reversal of the direction of manifest destiny points up the conditions for the conquests of global capital.

The text's peripatetic global holism remedies Marx's famous diagnosis of capitalist modernity as the "annihilation of space by time."

> Achieved:
> San Francisco's hills and fogs;

In one of its newspapers—
"Some of our best and largest dowagers
almost do the split";
Sing Fat Co.—merchants.

Across
The Pacific
The roving Red bands of South China
The poor would give to the poor,
when incited. Beyond

Parched earth and fog here:
Type of mind faking a thirst for itself—
Land's jest—
Concoctors of 'hard' poetry—
Dramatic stony lips, centaurs, theatrical rock—
Living in a tower beyond rock,
In the best imitation of Sophocles.[30]

In San Francisco, we encounter a found particular: a kind of Bretonian *hazard objectif* in the form of an advertisement placed by the "Sing Fat Co.—merchants" for propertied widows who "can do the split." Aside from the manifest sexual joke, the commerce in these "dowagers" also splits the entire Pacific in a straddling enjambment. This formal split must be performed "across the specific," that is to say, over the historically unique economic mediators of the Sing Fat merchants. The suggestion that the dowagers' "splits" are also moments of sexual congress carries over into their transpacific span, at once exploring the connectedness and relative autonomy of these geodistants. Avant Lefebvre, Zukofsky's poetics highlight the simultaneous and contradictory boundedness and fragmentation of modernity's global spaces.

The "merchants" function here in a way similar to *"A"*—8's "Jews . . . ordered to depart."[31] Again Zukofsky lands on the figure of the merchant to make legible the complex interconnections and divides of global capital. Inasmuch as Zukofsky's reference to the Sing Fat Company invokes the trade in picture brides for Chinese laborers afflicted by the Exclusion and Immigration Acts, "Sing Fat" signifies the central irony and violence by which an immigrant worker must purchase a wifely commodity by which to reproduce his labor power *as* commodity. Within the sophisticated urban center

of San Francisco—where significantly the Sing Fat Company did dominate much of Chinatown's trade—we find a class of Chinese laborers expressly imported for the purpose of rapid industrialization, but lacking a privatized, individuated family structure. The ad presents such a family as immediately producible via the import of a propertied, kinless woman.

"Across," broken into its syllabic subunits, emphasizes a comparative logic that unites geographies chiastically only to have them negate, or cross out, one another. Zukofsky strategically invokes the revolutionary periphery to counter the deeply racialized and ideological reception of mass print culture representations of Asian persons in the United States. "The roving Red bands" stand in as a radical negation of the very differently valenced Sing Fat merchants. The merchants' offer of exchange of persons for money presents us with an *identity-in-bad-faith*, wherein a false similitude results in the total reification of life. By contrast, we find, within Southern China, the poetic formal embodiment of a radical *political identity*: the "poor would give to the poor when incited." Behind "incited" sounds "invited"; in the revolutionary moment, force and volition adequate in the subject's striving toward a "Beyond." The postrevolutionary subject is not, as the Right would have it, legislated into being after the Revolution. Rather, the "roving Red bands" inaugurate the "Beyond" and, in their present revolutionary activities, are already acting on its behalf.

This "Beyond," is also beyond San Francisco's "Parched earth and fog"; China's temporal leap beyond America flummoxes representations of Asia as archaic or predeveloped. Indeed, the sudden textual intervention of Zukofsky's visit to the secluded "tower" of his contemporary, Robinson Jeffers, suggests that it is the West that trains its eye nostalgically on the past.[32] There Zukofsky finds an appetitive subject seeking an inauthentic freedom of archaic symbols ("centaurs") and indulging in parodic representations of nature ("dramatic stony lips"; "theatrical rock"). Jeffers's insincerity and bad faith effectively displace an aesthetic and political fidelity to the contradictions of unevenness. This "dramatic" and "jesting" ludic "theatre" of inauthenticity stages a nostalgic encounter with history and nature, in lieu of a sober confrontation with the stark facticity of unequal development. Jeffers's nostalgic work is permanently stalled in poesis rather than praxis, entowering itself above class struggle. This nonpraxical subjective comportment can never reconcile self and space; it is condemned to a pastiche of self-discovery in a "[fake] thirst for itself."

Zukofsky's modernism intervenes at once against nostalgia for a retro-

actively installed premodern plenitude, and more broadly, against a hegemonic ideology that would claim the progressive and the futural as the province of Western capitalism. The elaboration of a poetics of uneven development breaks open a critical aesthetic space from which Zukofsky can redress the errors of narratives of homogenized temporalities, whether they are oriented toward the aesthetic melancholies of nostalgia or the geocenter's monomaniacal fantasy of itself as the future anterior of progress.

Cracks in the Core: *"A"*—8's Letters from the Periphery

Zukofsky returns to China again in *"A"*—8, this time as marking the origin of a letter within a series of epistolary exchanges that punctuate this section of the poem. We begin with two "letters," the first in New York, the second, London, before a reencounter with the Chinese periphery in the third. The first letter of interest reveals, in parodic tone, the material interests subtending the human cost of war:

> "New York, N.Y.
> Editor, Times Union:
> I would die for dear old Standard Oil
> Ex-Soldier,
> 12:47 P.M."[33]

Sent by an "Ex-Soldier" from unknown regions into the mass cultural heart of the cosmopolitan core, the letter bears an unambiguous time stamp that marks many possible moments, including but not limited to: when the letter was penned; when the soldier left his profession; or, the time that he may have even "ex"pired. This structure excavates multiple event possibilities from the seemingly precise and singular punctualities of "Times Union" and "12:47." In order for this multiplicity to become legible, the reader must imagine the soldier in many different geographical locations: either overseas in combat, at "home" in the United States, or dead. The time stamp yokes together events articulated in simultaneous yet distinct global coordinates.

The passage alludes to the replacement of a national body, dressed with familial romance and nostalgia ("dear old Standard"), by a corporate one. The contraction of the nation into the entity of "~~Stan~~dard Oil" signals the hegemony of the corporate particular whose body is secretly comprised of hidden abstractions: war; profit; capitalism. Alongside this centralization, however, is an attendant historical logic of proliferation, division and fragmentation. The passage's composition postdates The U.S. Supreme Court–

ordered 1911 dissolution of Standard Oil into thirty-four separate companies. Also antedating the writing of *"A"*—8, 1932 marks the mass protests of the Bonus Army Expeditionary Forces. One of the earliest large Depression-era assemblages, the Bonus Army was comprised of veterans demanding the immediate redemption of their war wages, which had been issued in promissory notes, payable in twenty years time. The wages were, like Social Security, placed in a "trust fund" that would require the speculative fruition of the marriage between the state and regimes of financialization for its success. The passage's veteran ironically pledges fidelity to a dead company; outside the text, veterans demanded the closure, in the present, of the long gap between their labors past and their remuneration future. In the parataxis of these two moments, monopoly capital is allowed to live once again, if only to allow a subterranean glimpse into the new forms of finance capital that would separate the veteran from his pay.

From Karl Marx to Jenny Marx: A Letter Concerning the Social

The second letter—from Marx "to his daughter Jenny" in 1881—chronicles the perils of London "company" and ends with a strong predicative claim from Marx's "The Holy Family."

> Marx to his daughter Jenny:
> It is dull since you went away—
> Without you and Jenny and Harra and Mr. Tea.
> The day before yesterday the Dogberry Club was here . .
> I don't dislike the wife . . she has a brusque,
> Unconventional and decided way of thinking
> and speaking,
> But it is funny to see how admiringly
> Her eyes fasten upon the lips
> Of her self-satisfied garrulous husband.—
> The breast in the mental planking.—
> Company . . can't well live altogether without it,
> And that when you get it . .
> You try hard to rid yourself of . .
> Writing its signature different each time, so
> you cannot get your money back.
>
> This matter is the substratum of all
> Changes going on in the world.[34]

Zukofsky quotes directly from Marx's letter. Until the fifteenth line, Zukofsky's only extratextual intervention is "the breast in the mental planking." This intervention ventriloquizes an ironic voice that intimates Marx's perspective on the gendered banality of the couple with whom he is socializing. It turns out that in order to reveal as fully ideological the paternalistic familialism of that other company, "Standard Oil," we need to travel across the ocean to London and backward in time to the late-Victorian prehistory of American industrialization. What we find in London is that even the earlier iteration of "Company" denotes the rote practices of the bourgeois salon, not the loyal kinship of family life.

Before the section's closing lines from Marx-via-Engels, Zukofsky inserts a beguiling and syntactically clotted phrase: "writing its signature different each time, so / you cannot get your money back." The fragment's predictive status eludes interpretation even as it asserts an interclausal ("so") logical dependency. What or who is palimpsested by "its," and how does "its" mutability frustrate—or perhaps exemplify—the commodity logics of exchange and equivalence? The lines announce the re-production of the subject of any exchange. The subject's "signature" on any financial transaction must persist free from the drafts of history; its cursive must profess an endlessly predictable and atemporal relationship to language, remaining unchanged as the subject, and history, ages. Such a determinative analogy between nonhistorical language, ideological reproduction, and the circuits of exchange emerges from an anticapitalist modernism concerned with the pathological "even-ness" of similitude. This regrettable imbrication of subject formation, discursive life, and the tyranny of equivalence points up the political imperative of an aesthetic analytic rooted in asymmetry and difference. Against the coercions of abstract fungibility, unevenness unrestrains the subject of history from compulsory participation in the regimes of exchange equivalence.

These curious lines do even more work than this. They make strange the manifest qualities of monetary exchange, namely that one never receives in return the "same" tender that one has lent/invested in the first place. Only through the abstract quantification of labor value can the money-form condition the curiously alogical phenomenological reception of apparent selfsameness at the moment of the refund of "my" money. The apparent similitude of the money form is both obfuscatory and symptomatic of the actually existing universal that the money form hides: the circulation of congealed units of labor value. Put another way, the fort/da game of selfsame monetary exchange evinces through its form a "false" identity that nevertheless

expresses the latent, unsymbolizable content of universally abstracted labor power. When the subject of the exchange no longer appears as a transhistorical, stable identity, when it "writ[es] its signature different each time," the contract of exchange is split asunder and the selfsame appearance of money is estranged, and "you cannot get your money back." The fact that all of these disruptions and ideological displacements take place on the back of the gerund "writing," signals Objectivism's commitment to a determinative relationship between the materiality of language and the materiality of creative labor.

It is worth noting here that Zukofsky's passage advances a very subtle and specific form of discursive materiality. "Writing" renders the subject legible if by legible we mean that "writing" inscribes a subject permitted to appear only in the crosshairs of exchange. To this end, Zukofsky's materialism bears a loose resemblance to a poststructuralist account of a subject produced through the "materiality" of discursive utterance. Crucially, however, the above lines insist on the interpenetration of the subject of language and the subject of exchange. Only the excavation of asymmetry and unevenness in both of these circuits—language and exchange—can the subject apprehend the hidden abstraction of labor value as concrete and primary. After all, as Zukofsky cites Engels citing Marx in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, discussing the inseparability of the thinker from the world in which s/he thinks: "This matter is the substratum of all/Changes going on in the world."

"China, the one place it could happen": Materiality, Modernism, and Alterity

Zukofsky concludes this epistolary series with a fantastical rejection letter from Chinese publishers claiming that the acceptance of his faultless manuscript would have the unfortunate effect of pointing up the inadequacy of every publication thereafter:

> China, the one place it could happen:
> "Most honorable Sir,
> We perused your MS.
> with boundless delight. And
> we hurry to swear by our ancestors
> we have never read any other
> that equals its mastery.

Were we to publish your work,
we could never presume again on
our public and name
to print books of a standard
not up to yours.
For we cannot imagine
that the next ten thousand years
will offer its ectype.
We must therefore refuse
your work that shines as it were in the sky
and beg you a thousand times
to pardon our fault
which impairs but our own offices.
—, Publishers."[35]

Zukofsky introduces this elaboration of his genius-as-historical-exception with an exceptional claim of his own: "China, the one place it could happen."[36] This statement is multiply determined by, among other things, the (impossible) relationship of peripheral poet to peripheral geocultures. Zukofsky finds the recognition he seeks, but only to have it end in a negation that affirms his inassimilability. Zukofsky's very modernist self-fashioning as a marginalized genius mediates the subjective inhabitation of the contradictory, interstitial spaces opened up by the poetics of uneven development. His poetry is that of historical exception—it finds home in no national temporality; were it to appear to a public, national or otherwise, it threatens to become the event that throws into relief the occlusions of previous aesthetic practices and force a rupture in expression and praxis. To choose China as the site of this rupture is to (1) problematize the Orientalist fantasy that East Asia possesses Time without History, and (2) destabilize the attendant Poundian myth that cultural and political difference can dissolve itself into an inauthentic resolution, realizing a porous and immanently legible cultural exchange between East and West. In contrast to Pound's aesthetic ideology, conditioned fetishistically by his conceptualization of an Orient whose semantic lexicon is that of a wondrous immanence, above we find Chinese publishers fiercely self-conscious of historicity, cultural specificity, and perhaps most importantly, their contribution to the world history of print culture, movable type.[37]

By emphasizing the Chinese publishers' centrality to literary re-production,

this passage from *"A"* protests the commonplace account of cultural dissemination from core to periphery. In place of this dominant narrative, we find a Chinese embargo on Zukofsky's avant-garde export. The character of the rejection recalls the familiar and well-known tendency of the avant-garde to project their work as "ahead" of time. When Zukofsky resituates this temporal fantasy in the global periphery, he sublates this tendency to melancholically lament the absence of a public that their futural aesthetic denies the avant-gardists. Instead, Chinese publishers seek to defend themselves against Zukofsky's inimitable popularity. Here, the revolutionary modernist imagines himself in the context of global uneven development, overcoming *elsewhere* the antinomy between mass popularity and avant-garde forms, in an imagined response of the periphery to his work.

The fantasy of peripheral popularity and approval provides the conditions of success for a worlding of the Objectivist project, confirming the universal relevance of its avant-garde intervention. However, the "Chinese Publishers" foreclose the dissemination of the avant-garde text to the degree that its uniqueness will disabuse the public of the notion that literature is an endlessly iterable product of a cultural unfolding. Zukofsky's work (according to this passage!) has the potential to arrest peripheral literary reproduction altogether by utterly transforming the cultural demands of its public. China becomes a space where warm public reception might well synchronize with contemporary avant-garde practice. The passage's ludic quality offers a tonal corollary to this eutopic convergence; the comedic encourages anticipatory laughter at the not yet possible, and a self-deflating commentary on a fantasy that requires a sino-unseen for its realization.

A radical American modernism conceptualizes itself here in a contradictory fashion: it asserts its universality through a projection of potential global acclaim while at the same time reinscribing its aesthetic exceptionality by asserting a universal *uniqueness*. The alterity produced by uneven development is conjured for the purposes of a crucial negation: it is that other space where social reception and aesthetic production might cleave together only to find such a resolution foreclosed by the very periphery's anti-imperialist cultural embargo. Zukofsky plays, as he often does, on the contents of his surname when he writes "your work that shines as it were in the *sky*" (emphasis added). Pound had fantasized that ideogram might give way immanently to translatable meaning; Zukofsky, by some contrast, applies this principle to the avant-gardist author himself. We might think he is simply ventriloquizing Pound's notorious fantasy of Oriental immanence,

if he did not first fashion a world in which the avant-garde negation is always already preceded by the resolute—and determinate—negations of a global unevenness contoured by anti-imperialism.

Solidaristic Landscapes

For political and poetic revolutionary modernists, it turns out that *space* is that place where unevenness is legible and combination possible. In the foundational work of Lefebvre, we find the impulse to reverse "the annihilation of space by time." He describes his method:

> The approach taken here may be described as 'regressive-progressive'. It takes as its starting point the realities of the present: the forward leap of productive forces, and the new technical and scientific capacity to transform natural space so radically that it threatens nature itself. The effects of this destructive and constructive power are to be felt on all sides; they enter into combinations, often in alarming ways, with the pressures of the world market. Within this global framework, as might be expected, the Leninist principle of uneven development applies in full force: some countries are still in the earliest stages of the production of things (goods) in space, and only the most industrialized and urbanized ones can exploit to the full the new possibilities opened up by technology and knowledge. The production of space, having attained the conceptual and linguistic level, acts retroactively on the past, disclosing aspects and moments of it hitherto uncomprehended. The past appears in a different light, and hence the process whereby that past becomes a present also takes on another aspect.[38]

Lefebvre's dialectic of historical analysis finds common cause with the analytic method that Marx elaborates in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*. For Lefebvre, "the Leninist principle of uneven development" supplements Marx's analysis. More finely put, the detection of uneven development in all facets of material life—geographical, spatial, "conceptual," "linguistic"—ceaselessly contours and thickens the recursive process of dialectical thought through an accounting of "regressive-progressive" development.

Consider the following passage in the umbrage of that proposition:

> And history: in Shanghai,
> A woman's base swung into motion,
> Her arms played croquet,
> A Chinese stuck in barbed wire;
> Never wanting to sweep gold off the street —

Behind chicken coops,
Looms so close together, operators
Could barely stand up to work between them;
Fifty good reasons in that overcoat
Why he could not go back to Marked Tree —
Fifty holes from the guns of vigilantes,
Negroes and whites holding the doors
against night-riders.[39]

Zukofsky recounts images from the 1927 Soviet film directed by Yakov Bliokh, *A Shanghai Document*, which depicts in montage form the Nationalist defeat of the Communists in March of 1927. The film presents sharp comparisons of the excesses of "English Exploiters" and the "Chinese Bourgeoisie" to the bare lives led by Chinese peasants and workers. These juxtapositions precede an assembly of images from the "March Revolution" in which the Communists capture Shanghai, and soon after, meet their defeat and execution by the Kuomintang. Images of factory labor—with special attention to all-female shop floors—punctuate the film, delivering forth revolutionary hope in the face of loss, if only by dint of the sheer size and organization of the Chinese working class.[40]

Zukofsky disarticulates the film's portrayal of the Western body in its leisure; the female croquet player's militaristic "base" and "arms" operate in mechanical fashion, while the Chinese suffer imprisonment in barbed wire. News reports from the *New York Times* in 1935 provide material for the next two examples. Silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey, are also confined, their bodies pressed behind what the paper describes as "chickenwire"; Zukofsky's "chicken coops" offer an embittered revision, where production for profit is a twisted inversion of a "co-op," or collective cooperation. Zukofsky further excerpts from the report on the conditions of the silk shops in Paterson—a commodity that readers might more quickly identify with China itself—"looms so close together, operators / Could barely stand up to work between them."

Critics have praised *A Shanghai Document* for its use of "newsreel from both sides of the conflict. . . . Bliokh is using enemy material to criticize its own makers."[41] Zukofsky, too, recruits the language of hegemonic organs to populate a landscape of solidarities. The paper's report on events in Marked Tree, Arkansas, where the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union organized an interracial membership to defend themselves against racist night

riders, provides material for the final four lines of the passage. A fictional character who does not appear in the paper's five part series on the STFU parlays the transition from labor struggles in the North to the South: "Fifty good reasons in that overcoat/Why he could not go back to Marked Tree-/Fifty holes from the guns of vigilantes . . ." The image of an agitator whose coat bears the marks of anti-union violence binds together political violence in China, the textile weaving factories in Paterson, and the cotton fields of Arkansas. The commodity of the coat confesses visibly the violence of class struggle and links distant geographies, its woven fibers shot through an impossible number of times. It is also, significantly, in the possession of a veteran and current exile of that struggle, whose undead status implies that combining uneven developments requires of the subject both engagement and detachment. The parallels with the avant-garde modernist are suggestive; both exiled organizer and poet find the costs of such totalizations high. Surely the contemplative poet is not in the line of such fire, but his detached engagement is no less nurtured by political geographies. Zukofsky reads the landscapes of the national interior through the prism of global Communism, and in doing so, reconciles an observational coolness produced by geographical remove and cinematic detachment with a solidaristic enthusiasm for struggles within and without the United States.[42]

The Political Economic Coordinates of Revolutionary American Modernism: The Parataxis of History in Zukofsky's *Index of American Design*

Those already working within the analytic of uneven development have been fruitfully applying its key terms to describe the unequal dynamics of imperialism. But the concept of *combination*, and in specific its emphasis on interlocking uneven developments within the nation itself, dilates the analytic to include conflicts and class struggles emerging from those combinations within the American interior. The restoration of these spaces to the site of early-twentieth-century American capitalism is the political-economic sibling of what Cary Nelson has so usefully elaborated as the "recovery" of left poetic modernisms.[43]

In this effort, we might ask what coordinates combine and conflict to make Objectivism thinkable? Perry Anderson's critical discussion of Continental modernism's origins and aesthetics offers a triangle of such coordinates, and makes a compelling case for the primacy of unevenness in any genealogy of modernism:

> In my view "modernism" can best be understood as a cultural force field "triangulated" by three decisive coordinates. The first of these . . . : the codification of a highly formalized *academicism* in the visual and other arts, which itself was institutionalized within official regimes of states and society still massively pervaded, often dominated, by aristocratic or landowning classes that were in once sense academically "superseded," no doubt, but in others were still setting the political and cultural tone in country after country. . . . The second coordinate is . . the still incipient, hence essentially *novel*, emergence within these societies of the key technologies or inventions of the second industrial revolution. . . . The third coordinate of the modernist conjuncture, I would argue, is the imaginative proximity of social revolution.[44]

The first corner of Anderson's triangle is anchored by a Marxian account of the persistence of the ancien régime. This persistence, he argues, "and the academicism concomitant with [it], provided a critical range of cultural values *against which* insurgent forms of art could measure themselves but also *in terms of which* they could partly articulate themselves" (emphasis original).[45] Here Anderson places modernism in dynamic relation to a class formation that itself resides on the meeting of uneven contact points: "European modernism . . . arose at the intersection between a semi-aristocratic ruling order, a semi-industrialized capitalist economy, and a semi-emergent, or semi-insurgent, labour movement."[46] This approach finds its source in Marx's concept of historical time as it appears in the *Grundrisse*, described by Anderson as revealing "a complex and *differential* temporality in which episodes or eras [are] discontinuous from each other and heterogeneous within themselves" (emphasis original).[47]

In a critical supplement to Anderson's account of modernism's birth in this geography of class formations, Alex Callinicos argues the British landowning classes' precocious assumption of the role of a bourgeois capitalist class can help us to understand why "native" British modernism was so anemic:

> A thoroughly bourgeois society even before its relatively gradual but massive industrialization, Britain in the late nineteenth century did not offer the sharp contrast between old and new provided by the comparatively sudden onset of industrial capitalism in genuinely *ancien régime* orders such as Prussia, Russia and Austria-Hungary. The decisive contribution to English-speaking Modernism made by American émigrés is not less easy to explain from this perspective than the relatively slight role of natives in Britain: Eliot, Pound, and Lewis are characterized

> by an acute awareness of the contrast between the traditional high European culture they assimilated and the prodigious social transformation wrought by capitalist industrialization—changes which, of course, were taken to their farthest extreme in the land of Henry Ford.[48]

Here Callinicos insists on the combined lobe of the theory of combined and uneven development, pointing out that even as the ancien régime is indeed a historical residue, under the ever-condensing world of capitalism, it successfully "combines" itself with the functions and persons of the capitalist class, essentially *becoming* that class. The theory of combined and uneven development, then, shapes a critical theater in which the category of experience (or, for Callinicos, "awareness"), so often delimited by its longstanding relationship to that older literary analytic, social biography, registers geographic, political, economic, and cultural unevenness.

If transformations under the banner of uneven developmental combinations have indeed "been taken to their farthest extreme in the land of Henry Ford," one wonders why, until right here, right now, the rich political-aesthetic analytic of combined and uneven development has been reserved in its application to (rarely) continental and (most commonly) "peripheral" modernisms. In Anderson's and Callinicos's intriguing accounts of Anglo-modernism, nonnativity functions as the vanished mediator of complex and a-stagist class formation. Similarly, ascendancy and rot provide a suggestive model for an analysis of American modernism's own "triangulations." In a Depression-era United States, at least two of Anderson's coordinates remain in play: the rapid development of technology and the "imaginative proximity of social revolution." The occupant of that third corner of Anderson's triangle with its delicate amalgam of social, class, and cultural relations remains, however, unidentified. If we find Anderson's model compelling enough to draw on it to account for American modernist practice (and this author does), then the question emerges: what are the specifically American social and class formations that contour Objectivism's aesthetic intake of combined and uneven developments?

To answer this question, we turn to Zukofsky's analytic of economic and cultural development, engridded systematically in his "Outline for Book on American Arts Design," which was written during his work between 1938 and 1939 on the *Index of American Design*. The *Index* was sponsored by the Federal Arts Project, a subdivision of the Works Projects Administration. In the larger book project *Index*, we find evidence of Zukofsky's study of the

multiple temporalities of American capitalist expansion and national growth. Entries on topics such as "American Ironwork," "Chalkware," "American Tin Ware," and "American Kitchenware" depict in rich historical detail the dynamic by which the process of capitalist development at once engenders, then strains against, a class of independent craftsmen.

The ideas and organizational systems of the *Index* are deeply intertwined with Zukofsky's poetic labors of the same period. Indeed, the *Index* finds its way into *"A"*—8; its integration into the poem reveals the ways in which Zukofsky's poetics cannot be unbound from the methods of historical analysis that he nurtures in his more properly documentary historical work.[49] In the passage that follows, Zukofsky maps the geography of New York, using as coordinates the former workshops of artisans and craftsmen:

> The trolley goes across town
> From where was once the village of West Farms,
> And midway you get off; a short walk to 1229
> Washington Ave.,
> *Thomas Hicks, General Blacksmith and Tool Maker*.
> Borough of The Bronx, and this district in the
> nineteenth century
> The Township of Morrisania
> Where a century before that, on the waters of,
> They wanted to build the capital of the United
> States of America.
> His sign-board over the shop, a shed
> with a front of glass panes:
> Peered—saw twilight inside,
> That and early evening lamplight
> On the high ceiling, in the dust of some tools,—
> Before climbing one flight up wood stairs
> Past the old door, oak or what, heavy to push.
> The long second after the knock—"Mr. Hicks?"
> "Come in." A draft. Darkness,
> But for the flame of the belly-stove.
> And you did not see Russia in the green-blue
> light of the coal,
> Could faster see Lady Greensleeves
> quick now as fayërye;[50]

Hicks informs Zukofsky, the "researchist" for the WPA, about his

> . . . father and his grandfather
> Who had left the North—this borough here—
> for the West,
> And from himself who's come back from the West
> to the East.[51]

And, not surprisingly, the geography of macronational migration gives way rather organically to the historical details of the microurban:

> The gas station on Hicks' corner
> Had some time ago fumed out his garden.[52]

and finally opens out onto the prehistory of the Bronx property:

> "Hicks lived on Jim De Lancey's house, West Farms Rd.
> Jim De Lancey became so poor, he worked as a farmer
> On Thomas Powell's land. Powell had bought De
> Lancey's plots.
> Hicks bought off Cambrellion connected with the
> Powells.[53]

As Barry Ahearn has argued, Zukofsky found common cause with the traditions of American handicraft; the craftworker's commitment to form as inseparable from function made her/him a likely object of identification for an avant-gardist invested in the poem as an act of labor.[54] Zukofsky recovers, in the *Index* and in *"A,"* a tradition of labor prior to its total subsumption to the process of capital accumulation. The preceding passage reveals that not only does handicraft function as a historical precedent for Zukofsky as an artist, it also does specific work in the form of his poetics, where it animates a spatialized depth of presentation. Indeed, even as the trolley in the passage proceeds laterally across the landscape, we find it dipping vertically beneath the surface of the present to burrow beneath the "borough" of the Bronx.

The "nineteenth century," whose legacy of arable land survived in the names of extraurban villages like "West Farms," confesses even earlier roots in an eighteenth century that hardly participates in the progress narrative we might expect it to. Indeed, it is a century marked by the history of an unredeemed future possible, when "they wanted to build the capital of the United/States of America." It is here that Zukofsky finds Thomas Hicks and

his atelier. Even if the poet's word choice for his keen interest did not imply artisanal comradeship (he "peered" and is "peered"), his cinematic approach to Hicks's workspace affirms the patience and respect with which he approaches him. Like the operator of a tracking camera, Zukofsky moves from street to dwelling level and strains to see through "glass" a scene illuminated by both natural "twilight" and artificial "early evening lamplight." Here, we access a past that is alive in the present (and indeed, converse directly with its actors, as Zukofsky does in this passage). This access relies upon recognizing that what appears as immediately available to the eye is in fact at a sober remove that only "desire for historical and contemporary particulars" can even partially undistance. The window pane intercedes, the "high ceiling" perplexingly presents before the immediate eye-level situation, and "dust" gives shape to the tools beneath: Zukofsky's advance on the past is rigorously indirect. Such indirection springs from the ways in which Objectivism charges itself with the duty of defamiliarizing—here through intentional distantiation—fictions of smooth immediacy.

If the poet approaches the scene of Hicks's shop with caution, he treats the associations he makes during his encounter with equal suspicion. Indeed, Zukofsky is as alert to the connections that he does *not* make: "you did not see Russia in the green-blue/light of the coal" as to those that he does: he "could faster see Lady Greensleeves/quick now as a fayëre." In these difficult lines, reading material history for social dissonance is less a matter of automatic, trustworthy, and intuitive association than it is the result of a hard-won negotiation with scenes loath to sacrifice their lacquer of political neutrality. In lieu of the antihegemonic shock an encounter with unevenness might potentially deliver, we find only the decorative nostalgia of a fairied past. The light from the coal in the workshop of a preindustrial laborer does not easily divulge its transnational harmonies with laborers in Russia's similar developmental asymmetries. Such associative connection requires a more deliberative process than the "faster" one that yields freely the sunniest melodies of precapitalist fable. The lines document, in rather humorous fashion, how purposive attention to contemporaneous uneven development can yield a spatially sensitive partisan alternative to the apolitical fancy of seemingly spontaneous association.

Zukofsky's WPA-inflected poetics register the ways in which the historically variegated landscapes of the city also contain within themselves a broader history and social experience of national regional differentiation. The prehistory of Hicks's generation is populated by migrants who followed

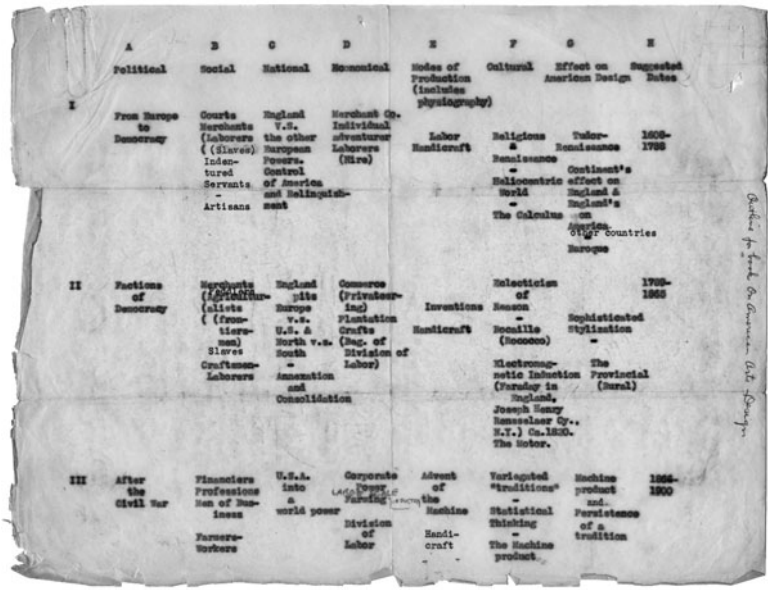
the fate of capitalist expansion and contraction as it transformed regional space within the United States, who "left the North—this borough here—/ for the West,/And . . . c[a]me back from the West/to the East." Here genealogy is but a formal variant of geography, and what has come to be the Bronx offers a prism of expansive, bicoastal developmental histories. Settling in one developmental sector, however, only intensifies Hicks's exposure to landscapes of loss, destruction, and emergence, where "the gas station on Hicks' corner/Had some time ago fumed out his garden." Older geographies of our domination of nature, arranged into garden plots, shrivel as newer ones, which make spatial territory of the air itself ("fume"), emerge.

These lines trace proximal developmental asymmetries to offer a window into the, by definition, unobservable processes of historical transition. It is precisely the vectors of such processes that Zukofsky wishes to track in the *Index* and its outline, which similarly documents the skill, rigor, and ingenuity of the early American craftsmen. Zukofsky's suggestive portraits in the *Index* are as much of their agential labors as they are of an economic landscape increasingly shaped by the concentration of capital deliberately incubated by tariffs, embargos, and land grabs. From Zukofsky's archive, the outline offers us a map of the historical system subtending the *Index*, and passages, such as the preceding, from *"A"* (see figure).

Zukofsky glosses the structure of his outline of American development: "The suggested dates are not absolute, but their usefulness becomes apparent when considering C and G together. This chart is offered as a working outline, to be verified by the facts, and not to be imposed on them. The "divisions" I, II, III are a convenience: they really flow into each other, carry over, and the continuity also harks back."[55]

Zukofsky's description of the relations between categories of historical time, cultural mediations, national space, and aesthetic developments reminds us of how Marx's *Grundrisse* provides a methodological framework for reading Zukofsky's modernism. Just as Marx elaborates the dialectical method of rising from the "simple to the combined," the categories of Zukofsky's schematic structure begin as simplified abstractions. These abstractions mean nothing without—yet are the only entry point into—a "combined" and uneven totality. Both Zukofsky and Marx emphasize the processual nature of comprehending historical development; continuity is only retroactively installed by acts of periodizations, endlessly revised.

Zukofsky's schematization restores space to time; the exemplary category facilitating aesthetic transitions happens to be the spatio-national (or,



"Outline for Book on American Arts Design." Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin. See appendix on p. 204 for a transcript.

"C and G together"). His first periodization is transatlantic ("From Europe to Democracy"); the second, intranational ("Factions of Democracy"), while the third leaves open the possibility of the nation-state's revolutionary negation entirely ("After the Civil War"). The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are characterized by shifting and simultaneous modes of production, with a merchant economy increasingly using laborers "freed" from farming land in common into waged slavery—"individual adventurer laborers (hire)." This period also sees the simultaneous existence of indenture and slavery.[56] Class struggle within the United States aids in the emergence of this historical illumination: the 1930s surge in interracial labor organizing in places like Marked Tree operates as an ambient necessity for reconceiving the long history of labor and race.

In the outline, the United States hosts multiple forms of labor; its reception and national transformation of preexisting labor regimes takes place under the continued influence of the ancien régime; the "effect on American Design" is twice mediated by the "Continent's effect on England & England's on America." "Handicraft" endures as a nonfading residual throughout all

the periodizations. The category's endurance suggests that Zukofsky saw and wrought his project in complex conversation with the long trajectory of the *artisan*, the key social actor in this residual arc. This is not to say that the works of radical modernists did not incorporate the vast store of Anglo-Continental pre-bourgeois cultural data collected by antecedents like Pound. Preferring Spinoza over Malatesta, Zukofsky's use of the sestina and canzone forms elsewhere in *"A"* and other poems are transatlantic sublations of those earlier expatriate American modernist encounters with the persistent cultures of the ancien régime described so succinctly by Anderson. As we discovered earlier, however, the transformations in Russia and the East, and the developmental diversities they exposed, were at least, if not more, central to Objectivism's aesthetic and political orientations. In light of this, how do Objectivists respond to similar but wildly different developmental variance within the United States itself, which, as W. C. Williams writes famously, "has no peasant traditions to give . . . character"?[57] Note, in Zukofsky's schema, that the rural only appears as a nameable category at the end of the eighteenth century. When it does appear, it arises in interdependent antagonism with "Sophisticated Stylization." Interestingly, Zukofsky, avant David Harvey, recognizes "The Provincial (Rural)" as *produced* by capitalist development.

The central question, of course, is not whether Zukofsky's history is "accurate" but rather why and how this Objectivist came to conceive of history as an interimbricated constellation of combined and uneven developments. Why does handicraft persist throughout and into this modernist's present day, reappearing without exception as a still-extant mode of production? In large part, it is because Depression-era crises threw into relief the fault lines of American geographies of profit, scarcity, and oppression. In other words, a historical rupture occurred during and after which it became possible to conceive of the history of American capitalist development, class struggle, and forms of labor as expressing the deep tectonics of developmental interdependency. Our analytical point of departure, the *Grundrisse*, again proves helpful in understanding how Zukofsky's historical analysis emerges into possibility. According to Marx, the precondition for abstraction is the fullest development of the material from which the abstraction arises:

> Indifference towards any specific kind of labour presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant. As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest pos-

> sible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone. On the other side, this abstraction of labour as such is not merely the mental product of a concrete totality of labours. Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form. Such a state of affairs is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society—in the United States. Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category "labour," "labour as such," labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.[58]

Zukofsky's "Outline" proceeds uncannily along these very principles. Its chief categories are abstractions of real social processes (that is, "Political," "Social," "National," and so on), and its guiding structure is that of combined and uneven developments, or as Ernst Bloch would have it, "the synchronicity of the non-synchronous." The Depression hastened the full development of radical political, economic, and social asymmetry; indeed, Harvey describes the 1930s Depression as a global instantiation of the pressure in individual capitalist regions to create a repository for overaccumulations. He writes that this tendency "appears to work to the long-term stabilization of capitalism, confining crises formation and devaluation to localized events (the closure of plants here and rising unemployment there)."[59] The competition between regions rages about "who is to bear the costs of devaluation" and incites "geopolitical struggles . . . at the global scale, with unpredictable outcomes and potentially violent outcomes."[60] We should be clear that, among these so-called unpredictable and potentially violent outcomes is the intensification of class struggle within the core itself. The Depression is not "exceptional" insofar as it is simply the critical expression of long-standing contradictions internal to capital; however, its historical punctuality—that is, its transformation of contradiction into a legible crisis—fertilizes a Marxian modernism whose abstractions stem from concrete social, economic, and political tendencies within the capitalist development of the American

state in particular. By delinking abstraction from the metaphysical (be it the Eliotic transcendental, the Stevensian ethics of Imaginative *eironeia*, or even Williams's democratic metaphysics of particulars), Zukofsky's outline reveals how depressive crises actually generate the very categories by which particulars achieve and articulate their "richest possible concrete development."

If American expatriates like Pound and Eliot confronted an Anglo-European terrain in which developmental combinations were culturally mediated by the academic traditions of the ancien régime, radical modernists like Zukofsky emerged into national developments contoured by the contradiction between capitalism's promise of progress and the reality of its crises. In this moment, it is not the tenacious but superannuated sectors of the ruling class that are the central concern for modernists but rather the lived effects of what Harvey describes as the battle over "who is to bear the costs of devaluation" on the one hand and capital's desperate crisis-driven need to establish and exploit new "spatial fixes" on the other.[61] In Depression-era America, radical modernists were inspired to craft a poetics of uneven development from below.

Zukofsky takes his term *handicraft* directly from Marx, for whom the word refers first to that precapitalist product of relatively independent artisans and laborers often organized in guild networks, then again, to that *form* of labor, incorporated by incipient, then developed, capitalist industry. Handicraft commands an indexical relationship to historical transition. When Zukofsky notes the persistence of its appearance, alongside recognizably modern phenomenon such as "inventions" or "advent of the machine," he registers the degree to which capitalist development produces, depends upon, and reproduces modes (and spaces) of production occluded by commonplace conceptions of modernity and modernization. As the Depression pointed up the consistency of inconsistent development, it also in turn unmasked the persistence of informal economies (agricultural, small-batch commodity production, barter, and so on). While the Depression deepened, and immiserated populations began to migrate, it became clear that these informal economies were, along with the objects of extranational imperialist conquest, meant to "bear the costs of devaluation" for the industrialized sector; at the very least, these arenas of production were to provide a much needed "spatial fix" in a time of crisis for the dominant economic sector. The very commission of *The Index of American Design* by the Federal Arts Project is symptomatic of the state's dual drives: to perpetuate the appearance of handicraft as a nativist "tradition" that legitimates a specifically American

formation of advancing capitalism and to catalog, with Foucauldian designs, forms and spaces of labor with remaining extractable potential. Zukofsky's work on the *Index* of course mediates these economic substrates in complex ways.

Handicraft, for Zukofsky, provides a category by which we might read the operations of capital-in-crisis *negatively;* it is that historical form of labor whose appearance as an abstraction is activated by the algebras of uneven development. Raymond Williams's model of dominant, residual, and emergent remains invaluable to any account of the relationship of culture to such unevenness. Williams writes: "By residual I mean that some experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation."[62] By gentle contrast to Williams's "nevertheless," Zukofsky's "Outline" makes explicit that what appears to be residual is the constant, necessary companion to capital itself. In a time of crisis, the residual provides a place to which the reserve army of labor might turn, and in doing so, unweight big capital of some of its crisis of overproduction. Handicraft also performs, as we have seen, certain ideological services as well. It resutures labor to popular, familial life within the American state precisely at a time when mass numbers of the population are prepared to take militant industrial action.

Lenin reminds us that handicraft is not separate from capital, but rather a necessary and embedded part of production for profit, when he warns against the various fantasies about handicraft—that it only occurs in the countryside or that all craftsmen own their own tools and are as yet unwaged or that handicraft is an enterprise defined by its local insularity. Instead, Lenin emphasizes that handicraft has a basic "similarity" to wage labor, that "often enough an industrial district embraces a town and the surrounding villages," and that "family cooperation" is not only "the guarantee of the development of capitalist cooperation" but that it is in fact "the pledge and foundation of capitalist cooperation."[63]

To view handicraft as Zukofsky and Lenin do is to at once to demystify its function as providing the ideological fantasy of "peasant traditions" (or "yeoman," as Pound would have it) native to the United States and to retrieve its specific relationship to the uneven development of the American state. Zukofsky's Marxist account of history and aesthetics textures his appropriation of precapitalist poetic forms. His diagnosis that the modern

moment of design consists of "Machine Product and the Persistence of a tradition" announces that combined and uneven development remains for him a fundamental analytic in *every* facet of human affairs, including aesthetics. Jameson writes on the effect of combined and uneven development on the sensibilities of the modernists: "Modern art . . . drew its power and its possibilities from being a backwater and an archaic holdover within a modernizing economy: it glorified, celebrated, and dramatized older forms of individual production which the new mode of production was elsewhere on the point of displacing and blotting out."[64] Zukofsky, in his Depression-era account of how seemingly precapitalist particulars are, in actuality, the expression of contemporary capitalist combined and uneven developments, shows how the "archaic" is constantly reproduced at the crest of historical development. In the "Outline" to the *Index* and in *"A,"* Zukofsky paratactically presents both "archaic" and avant-garde forms not as a retreat from capitalist development but rather as a poetic sublation of its inner workings.

2 G. Oppen, Materialiste

Cinematic Capitalism

"Frankly, I paste without cutting."

Oppen, 1969

". . . FROM DISCRETE SERIES TO THE MARXISM WAS NOT A 'BREAK'———BY ANY MEANS . . ."

Oppen, 1973

George Oppen's first published work, *Discrete Series* (1934), at once marked the poet's entrance and then-indefinite departure from the world of literary modernism. Composed of thirty-one poems with relations that often vex, *Discrete Series* was Oppen's last major poetic work to appear until twenty-five years later, when he began writing the poems of *The Materials* (1962), *This in Which* (1965), and the Pulitzer Prize–winning *Of Being Numerous* (1968). Immediately after the publication of *Discrete Series*, Oppen set literary life aside to organize with the Communist Party, serve in World War II, and at greatest length, practice carpentry in Mexico, far from the FBI agents increasingly interested in his prior and current political commitments and activities.

Many literary historians place *Discrete Series* within the Imagist tradition.[1] This chapter will both concur and demur, noting that Oppen's early work emerges in complex fashion from a historically short-lived intersection of divergent modernist traditions. The text itself is the impress of Oppen's simultaneous engagements with both left and right modernist tendencies. Oppen composed parts of *Discrete Series* during his trip to Europe in 1929, where he met Pound by way of Zukofsky's introduction. During this time, Oppen was also actively involved with To Publishers, the Objectivists' press, which published W. C. Williams's early poetry, Pound's *How to Read*, and

Zukofsky's *An "Objectivists" Anthology*. Indeed, *Discrete Series* finds formal solidarities with Williams's 1930s short lyrics as much as it does with the aesthetic energies of Imagism. The work is charged at the contact points between first- and second-generation Anglo-American literary modernism. Published eighteen years after H.D.'s *Sea Garden* and under historical circumstances radically altered from Imagism's first flush, *Discrete Series* debuted in the same year as the Christian homiletics of Eliot's *The Rock*, and Pound was immersed in the reconceived American pragmatism of his post-XXX *Cantos*. While the *Series* offers an index of Objectivism's ideological divergence from the first generation, it also testifies to the chimerical and resilient portability of the forms of that earlier avant-garde.

At the same time that Pound was returning in his post-Imagist work to the allusive hypotaxis that Imagism had sought to supersede, we find Oppen's *Discrete Series* embracing spare negations. In doing so, *Discrete Series* allows us to see the ways in which Objectivist works offer us a genealogy of a modernism characterized as much by the forward march of innovation as by recursive returns to generative, provocative forms. Indeed, I will argue in this chapter that Oppen revisits Imagism in order to pursue a utopian aesthetic project promised, and abandoned, by an earlier generation. Like the American landscape in which it was written, *Discrete Series* engages synchronously with an uneven coexistence of expressive forms; Oppen's work finds redemption for the potentials of once-emergent forms like Imagism in a return to the older forms of Realism. *Discrete Series*' exploration of the reifying effects of the perceiving "I" is both a commentary on the aesthetic limits of late Realism and a poetic alternative to the reemergence of the egoic subject in post-Imagist poetics.

In Oppen's *Series*, history does not disclose a moral guide or offer a recuperative example; rather, as in Zukofsky's *"A,"* historical junctures constellate perceptual data, which the poet in turn borrows and arranges. *Discrete Series*' constructed montages of country and city, and of sea and land, reflect the Objectivist's tendency to articulate historical arrangements in the vocabulary of geographic particulars, with special attention to the asymmetrical topographies that upset narratives of unified, unchecked progress. Through its formal merging of Imagism's potentials with an Objectivist's attention to highly differentiated social surfaces, *Discrete Series* achieves legibility only through the aggregation and combination of its separate scenes. As the reader stitches each stanza into a social fabric, the *Series* as a whole is tex-

tured with themes, correspondences, and recurrent afterimages. Successive poems in the series undergo constant revision of their discrete, individual meanings as they interact with their antecedents and heirs. In the end, the aggregate meaning of the *Series* depends as much upon readerly intake of each poem's image as it does upon the material rhythms of the text taken as a whole.

Early Oppen shares with the Imagists a commitment to the exploration of the perceptual grounds of broad structures of social, phenomenological life. However, as an avant-gardist within an avant-garde, Oppen presses forward, to a place after the contradictory boundaries of Imagist innovation. The *Series* seeks the beyond of an Imagism whose invisible speaker's egoic eye is dilated so large that it appears universal, invisibly commanding even the movement's stated desire for each image to bear immanent meaning; the *Series* also drives beyond the metaphors whose fatigue Imagism was meant to remedy. While *Discrete Series* still operates on occasion within the screenshots of lyricism that Imagism couldn't quite shake, its serial form energizes the movement and synergetic action of and between each image in the series.

Discrete Series, then, confirms certain of Objectivism's political and aesthetic coordinates. Objectivists, bathed in the radical cultures of the first third of the twentieth century, veered from the rightist withering of post-Imagist expatriate modernism, and continued to pursue Imagistic aims through a dialectical resurrection of those early modernist forms. Energized by an increasing awareness of capitalist modernity's thickening interdependencies, Oppen distends Imagism's emotional complexes into a materialist seriality. *Discrete Series* deploys a hybridized form that merges the Imagists' focus on particulars with Objectivism's aleatory capaciousness. These forms, to be examined here in detail, allow the *Series* to extend the Imagists' project of creating nonfungible, luminous forms that offer provisional indemnity against the pressures of reification while at the same time arranging such forms in a dynamic system of relational meaning. In its hands, Imagism's photographs become Objectivism's moving pictures, and as such, *Discrete Series* stands as a document of early modernism's unfinished projects, and as a manifesto of its potentials.[2]

Writing about the couple's intellectual and experiential development in the years immediately prior to the composition of *Discrete Series*, Oppen's wife, Mary, describes their first exploratory adventures in the New York City

urban landscape in 1928–9: "We didn't yet know the subway system, and we got off at stations at random just to see what was above ground. Once we stuck out heads out into a cemetery, another time we were on clay fields with standing pools of water, and once we were among gigantic identical apartment buildings in the Bronx, block after block."[3] Oppen returns to this scene in a 1965 letter describing the writing of *Discrete Series*: "I thought too late—30 years too late—that the flyleaf should have 14, 28, 32, 42 which is a discrete series: the names of the stations on the east side subway."[4] Oppen's relationship to the unevenness of the urban landscape is one of discovery and experimentally calculated surprise. His perceptions undergoing perpetual revision, the subway rider discovers the city and its edges through an experience of its differential geographies. Received in discrete yet interdependent successive images through windows not unlike the frames on a moving picture reel, the workaday landscape of capitalist modernity does not offer to the rider of its subways such immanent metonymies or aphoristic encapsulations as one finds in Pound's iconic Imagist poem "In a Station of the Metro." Oppen's description of the structure of *Discrete Series* suggests a different kind of modernist aesthetic, one that reconstructs the connective tissues between the autonomous data of modern life in order to apprehend the unfolding scenery as a vast relation of particulars.[5] The reader's encounter with *Discrete Series*, like the Oppens' experiences of the landscape, takes place on the fissured textures of permanent revision, on a map contoured by holistic embrace.

Oppen's analogy between the arrangement of the New York City subway system and the overall structure of *Discrete Series* evinces a now familiar Objectivist interest in the cracked and expanding geographies of 1930s America.[6] *Discrete Series*' depiction of the simultaneity of fracture and connectedness in capitalist culture finds, like Zukofsky's early *"A,"* its critical cousin in Lefebvre's account of concurrently "fractured and homogenized" spaces. Exploring the dialectic between subject formation and spatial differentiation, Lefebvre, like Oppen, asks "How does this space, which we have described as homogenous and broken up, maintain itself in view of the formal irreconcilability of these differences?"[7] The answer, for Lefebvre, is the ideologico-perceptual processes in which this tension is "smothered . . . and replaced by an appearance of consistency."[8] *Discrete Series*' isolated scenes testify against this lie of noncontradiction, while its serial form situates "broken up" particulars in a rigorously heterogeneous totality.[9]

Oppen "Listens to Women": The Series on the Precipice of the Century

The form and content of the first poem of *Discrete Series* together announce a primary concern of Oppen's early work: the status and fate of the lyrical voice in, against, or with a chorus of mass cultures and the flapping din of unfurling geographies. Structured around an allusion to Henry James's "The Story in It" (1902), the poem stages the crisis of a female subject confronted by modernity's conflicting demands. Oppen's protolyric offers a poetic innovation of the clotted syntax of James's late-realist sentence, arranging a montage of its clauses, as if, in Oppen's words, the poet had "paste[d] without cutting" James's recursive syntax.[10] In fits and starts marked by punctuation and line breaks, multiple meanings within the poem—and the poem's multiplication of meanings—hinge upon syntactical architectures girded by prepositional modifiers and appositive interjections:

> The knowledge not of sorrow, you were
> saying, but of boredom
> Is—aside from reading speaking
> smoking—
> Of what, Maude Blessingbourne it was,
> wished to know when, having risen,
> "approached the window as if to see
> what really was going on";
> And saw rain falling, in the distance
> more slowly,
> The road clear from her past the window-
> glass—
> Of the world, weather-swept, with which
> one shares the century.[11]

In James's short story, Maude Blessingbourn (James spells her surname with no "e") consumes the latest of French novels while waiting for Colonel Voyt, after whom she secretly pines. The centerpiece of the story is a closet drama in which Blessingbourn and the colonel debate the nature and purpose of art. Blessingbourn laments the limited offerings of uniform characters and the absence of female moral models, while the colonel insists that the very basis of dramatic and novelistic literary form is misbehavior and decadence.

"The Story in It" chronicles the contraction of possible content featured in literature increasingly commercialized by mass production and consumption. Following James, Oppen begins with a female witness to the contradictory tendencies of modern literature: the freedom to consume a multiplying number of genres expands vastly, as the horizon of thinkable representations shrinks in tandem. James's realist narrative documents, but demurs a resolve of, these antinomies. *Discrete Series*' examination of modern literary form begins where James's ends: at the edge of the century. Taking as its point of departure a female subject remaindered by the narrowing ideological terrain afforded by the narrative forms of the novel—which Blessingbourne continues to consume even as she recognizes their limitations—the poem addresses the deep anomie occasioned by the experience of the passage from one historical moment to the next.

Oppen's Blessingbourne accordingly embodies many familiar modernist concerns, including the subject's place in history, the uncertainty of perception, and the representational limits of realism's symbolic economy. If the "knowledge . . . of sorrow" reminds of Goethe's Young Werther straddling the epochal shift between Romantic and modern, Oppen's Blessingbourne insists from the beginning that the task of *Discrete Series* is "not" to mourn. The subject who thrives into and beyond the transition into the twentieth century is not one that indwells in unrecuperative mourning but one who can discern the trajectory of what, we will remember, Zukofsky calls the "direction of historic and contemporary particulars."[12] A contemplative Blessingbourne encounters "the world, weather-swept, with which one shares the century," from behind glass. Later poems in *Discrete Series* reveal an enduring preoccupation with the phenomenological qualities of glass, which functions as a symbolic index of the perils of mistaking the available surfaces of the world for the transparent disclosure of its oft-hidden histories. Here, Blessingbourne, like the subway rider, strains to see "what really was going on."

Line 7's conjunction, "as if", merges the subjunctive with a figurative simile and in doing so signals the rapprochement of two tendencies. The quest for epistemological certainty, or the desire "to see what really was going on," here reckons with the tendency of perception to be shaped by the structures of language, which works sometimes laggishly through the approximations of simile and figuration. "The road clear from her past the window-glass" further develops the representational contours of this entanglement of the world and its comprehension in the structures of language

and perception. The road stretches clearly "past," or beyond, "the window." Yet the line's syntactical ambiguity suggests a simultaneous, alternative reading of "past" that alerts us to Blessingbourne's own historicity: the road is also "clear," or discernibly, "from her past." Oppen's syntax maintains the historical contours of perception and epistemological in productive tension. Epistemological clarity is achieved as the modern subject realizes her historical horizon. This partnership of person and history is hardly cozy; the subject's occupation of a difficult space between her past and her future potentiality produces an anomie of "boredom." The poem, then, is profoundly exemplary of the larger Objectivist project of binding historical sense to the very possibility of objectivity.

The road acts as both conduit and break from Blessingbourne's past, suggesting that perceptual clarity quickens in a subject sensitive to the historical qualities of the phenomenal world. Blessingbourne's vision sharpens when it picks the lock of historical transition: that is, when it comes to apprehend the world as the product of a definitive past and a possible future. Here we might also see Blessingbourne as the instantiation of the kind of historical thinking attending what Jameson calls "the dialectic of the break and the period," a " twofold movement, in which the foregrounding of continuities, the insistent and unwavering focus on the seamless passage from past to present, slowly turns into a consciousness of a radical break; while at the same time the enforced attention to a break gradually turns the latter into a period in its own right."[13] Fascinatingly, the poem screens this dialectic on the canvas of the enervated novel form; emerging from this break, the new historical horizon requires a new literary form, whose contours it is Blessingbourne's (here unfinished) task to discern in the distance.

Oppen defers Blessingbourne's appearance—only then to bookend her by the stuff of "what" and "it" ("Of what, Maude Blessingbourne it was,/ wished to know")—with a brief "aside." This condensed "aside" contains a triptych of domestic parlor activities, "reading speaking/ smoking," drawn from that world of bourgeois ornament described so extensively in James's late realist narratives. In James, such gestures are figured as details necessary to the descriptive realism of narrative representation, which is, of course, the primary and dominant literary means of staging the psychic interiority of the subject of modern life. In Oppen's renovated aside, these extracts of everyday life cannot be mistaken for merely descriptive detail. Indeed here such particulars are set "aside" and rendered subordinate possessions of a larger field of knowledge and action: they are "of what,"—a broader world—

"Maude Blessingbourne," our perceiving lens, "wished to know." In its catholic embrace, the genitive anaphora "of" links Blessingbourne's wish "to know" with the poem's concluding line, "of the world, weather-swept, with which one shares the century," and marks the overcoming of the realist particular-as-ornament by the historical breadth of the Objectivist. The rhythm of this repeated preposition creates a poetic and ideational link between Blessingbourne's desire to acquire knowledge of both her immediate situation and that larger chronotope, the weather-swept world of the shared century.

In Eliot Weinberger's preface to Oppen's *New Collected Poems*, we are reminded that in Oppen's "last years, there was a piece of paper pinned over his desk that read: 'Only one mistake Ezra! You should have talked to women.'"[14] In the spirit of this communication, Oppen's Blessingbourne offers a feminist alternative to the titular protagonist in Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. In some contrast to Mauberley's fraught rehearsals of prior aesthetic forms and aghast reception of twentieth-century "kinema" cultures, Blessingbourne greets the future with sober inquiry. In Oppen's female-centric account of the break into the new century, the subject of modernity is the searching remainder of the difference between the utopian desire and the frustrated ability to bond knowledge (our "wish[es] to know") with the radical reconfiguration of the social collective, with which we "*share* the century" (emphasis added).

Sentences of Poetry: Oppen's Postnarrative Deictics

The Blessingbourne poem continues to generate critical waypoints for our study. In chapter 1, we explored the ways in which the 1920s and '30s sections of Zukofsky's *"A"* arrange an ensemble of modernity's combined and uneven historical, cultural, social, and political developments. The structure of *Discrete Series* attests that Oppen too compels radical and abrupt adjacencies of simultaneously occurring, diverse phenomena. The *Series* authors the prequel of this Objectivist commitment to aggressive parataxis; throughout its poems Oppen explores the origins of modernist form in the aporias of late-realist narrative structure. In Blessingbourne, he employs a ludically distended form of hypotaxis to emphasize the pivotal role that unfolding grammatical relations play in any seemingly singular, immediate scene. "Knowledge" accrues over a series of grammatical deferrals: "aside from," "of what," "having risen." The clotted syntax of James's sentence,

modeled by Oppen's hands, checks its own grammatical completion, indexing an anxious inadequation between the diachronic unfolding of the sentence and that synchronic aggregate of the world that it seeks to describe. More than this, though, in Oppen's poetics, grammatical deferral draws attention to the subject's constitution by a history, and a language, that precedes it.

This exaggerated prolonging of hypotaxis makes manifest the latent multiple temporalities of the sentence form. Our Blessingbourne poem begins with the past imperfect, indicating the imprecise, near-past moment of the poem's initial enunciation: when "you were/saying." We then turn to Blessingbourne's personal domestic temporality, in the implied past of the poem: "having risen." "And saw rain falling, in the distance/more slowly" traces this past forward in both time and space. We conclude with Blessingbourne abstracted into a universal subject of the present, a present that is always right now becoming history: "with which *one* shares the century" (emphasis added). The structure of deferred grammatical-temporal completion provides a durée in which new forms exfoliate from the "boredom" of that interstitial moment in which the break has not yet produced a new period recognizable in its own right. Oppen exposes the skeletal joints of hypotactical form, and in doing so, writes the elegy of realism at the end of the century. This elegy, it turns out, frees the multiplicities of James's prose for a second life in poetics. Oppen's poem grave-rubs the turn to parataxis itself; it detects the copresence of the simultaneous histories incubating in the limits of late realism's anti-telic narrative syntax. By exaggerating the familiar hypotactical forms of the realist sentence, Oppen reveals, in the crooks of its elided grammatical connections, overlapping temporal contexts of vistas past, present, and future.

Language poet Ron Silliman cites Oppen's formal innovations in syntax, "toward parataxis," as a foundation for his own work in what Silliman calls "The New Sentence," which is polysemic and postrealist.[15] If Oppen's "sentence" has persisted into the poetics of the present, this is perhaps because it emerged as a poetic transformation of late realism, and it continues to capture the ways in which the poetry of the avant-garde must confront the persistent formal hegemony of the sentence in the construction of historical narratives.[16] Recognizing the enduring gravitational force of the sentence form—and acknowledging the continuing specter of realism's narratives in the discursive structures of modernity's self-understanding—the *Series*

excavates glacial striations, or deep cross sections of abutting historical moments, from those seemingly unified narratives by "pasting" hypotactical units bestride and atop one another.

Drawing still further on the legacy of the Jamesian sentence, "Blessingbourne" introduces a formal concept that will drive the whole *Series*: the use of ambiguous deictic reference to gesture expansively at farther fields of reference and context.[17] Oppen's deictics point toward unnamed referents whose identities will shift in time with the reader's own context. For example, the deictic "the" preceding "century" suggests that "one" (yet another deictic) must necessarily periodize, but that such periodizations emerge from aggregate referential signification whose discrete units register individually and together various historical vectors and currents. In some contrast to a linear narrative of the emergence of the "modern" twentieth-century world from a clearly foreclosed past of the nineteenth century, Oppen's abstract designation "the century" does not mark a numbered page in progress's calendar of chronological succession; it remains open to application to the specific confluences of the reader's own present. Deictics, with their referential correspondences elsewhere in the material nimbus that envelops the text, complement the *Series*' aleatory historical imagination. As words that "point" to objects and temporal locations beyond the geography of the page, deictics register at once the agency of the poet as gestural arranger, and the historical situation that will always exceed his words.[18]

Oppen's subway ride proves an enduring model for the formal turns of the *Series*' deictics. The system connecting the local scenes of the urban totality is itself not graspable except in its linkages of singular, particular instantiations; the landscape contoured by the webs of mass transportation provides the itinerant poet with no stable referent. It lurches forward, backward, and laterally, and the profusion of its directions breaks the back of the sentences too few limbed to describe the simultaneity of its opposing movements. From each station stop to the next, a deictic, retrieved from the sinking ship of Jamesian realism, points to possible futures and the vexed geographies to which we now turn. Just as often the futures incubated in Oppen's modernity remain aleatory and unfixed by Blessingbourne's searching eye, so do they appear as the terminus of predestined, mechanized routes traveled endlessly by the *Series*' elevators and steam shovels.

Producing Nature / Naturalizing Production: The Geographies of *Discrete Series*

Cities

Blessingbourne gazes out onto modernity's "weather-swept world" whose urban and nonurban spaces the remainder of *Discrete Series* will explore. The individual poems within *Discrete Series* treat the wildly varied physical, cultural, and economic developmental theaters as inextricably linked through their shared historical horizons, and their total arrangement opens up that horizon to a larger possible coherence. After the first poem, however, geographic details embedded in subsequent poems sway unattached to such a panoramic point of reference. The following poem, for example, describing the directional lights over an elevator car, offers an exploration of a rather isolated object, stripped of its context. Can deictics, strategically placed, restore the web between an image and its ambient geography? The poem's literally vertiginous surge formally reproduces the elevator's mechanical movements:

White. From the
Under arm of T

The red globe.

Up
Down. Round
Shiny fixed
Alternatives

From the quiet

Stone floor . . .[19]

The deictics "From," "Round," and, again, "From" mark the hinges of a tripartite structure, and invite our examination of modern capitalist architecture simultaneously, and by turns, from above, within and beneath. "Round" is both an adjectival modifier, describing the shape of the lights, and, alternatively, an indicator of the passenger's own circumscribed movements. The final "from" serves a similarly dual purpose: it describes the movement of the passenger in the elevator while simultaneously figuring the mechanized "alternatives" as emerging "from the quiet / Stone floor." This repetition suggests that such delimited "alternatives" (white for up and red for down)

spring from an instrumentalization of nature itself: the floor of modernization's skyscraper is fabricated from the "stone" that lies beneath it. In a 1963 letter to Charles and Brenda Tomlinson, Oppen comments on this poem, linking the elevator's "limited alternatives" to "the limited alternatives of a culture."[20] Where Maude "saw . . . the road clear from her past the window," here, the routine path of the elevator has radically delimited even a glass-bound horizon of possibility. The poem activates a tension between the allusive freedom of deictic-driven syntax and the restriction of action by the spatial regimes of urban capitalism (In chapter 5, we will see how Zukofsky's "Mantis" offers a transcendence from such structures as it animates a subway car and lifts it aloft, and above the "stones.")

Oppen's deictics open up a textual terrain where multiple synchronies interact. The interdependency of all phenomena of capitalist life is neither necessarily bemoaned nor celebrated. Indeed, Oppen apprehends the currents of modernity as double-sided and contradictory, coursing with the irreconcilability of progressive (a whole "red globe") and reactionary ("white") tendencies. The fixed elevator—and the deictics that encourage a gestural freedom—testify to the simultaneous contraction and expansion of social possibility, and fret any monochromatic vision of the twentieth century's political gestalt.

The *Series* is everywhere concerned with the spatial regimes of the city. The following poem, for example, treats together the movement of labor, people, and transportation on the urban street. In it, Oppen situates the speaker within a constellation of overlapping technologies and modes of production, registering the asymmetries of modernization:

Who comes is occupied
Toward the chest (in the crowd moving
        opposite
Grasp of me)
                In firm overalls
The middle-aged man sliding
Levers in the steam-shovel cab,—
Lift (running cable) and swung, back
Remotely respond to the gesture before last
Of his arms fingers continually—
Turned with the cab. But if I (how goes
        it?)—

The asphalt edge
Loose on the plateau,
Horse's classic height cartless
See electric flash of streetcar,
The fall is falling from electric burst.[21]

The unidentified "Who" reminds us of the Oppenian strategy we first observed in the Blessingbourne poem: what linguists refer to as "person deixis" or a deictic reference to a participant/referent, here appears in the form of an initially anonymous approaching figure. In the absence of context, this figure's action ("comes") becomes his/her only identifying characteristic; indeed, it functions as the very surname of the subject itself ("Who Comes"). Language descriptive of that subject's actions registers the opposing pulls of public culture and private individuation: "occupied" describes both individual habitus (as in "occupied by thoughts of") and census categories of labor (His occupation? Miner). This double assignation interimbricates interior life with public experience. Bearing an affect likened to the state of the crowded streetcar ("occupied"), this individual passenger appears at first as a randomized abstraction, exchangeable with the subjects that surround him. And overarchingly, the word *occupied* conjures political possibilities latent in the scenes of labor and mass transportation; in the 1930s, the word was still in its adolescence as a term for collective protest actions that aim to make public space public, and its appearance here marks its emergence in discourses of radical intent.[22]

The speaker is introduced thusly, in dissent of the individuation announced by the lyric form. The poem emphasizes the limits to any individual's total embrace of his or her surroundings. The scene exceeds the subject's "grasp," and the form remarks upon this genitivally, suggesting that the surroundings hold the speaker in their possession ("Grasp of me"). Here the lyrical "I" undergoes a decisive revision as a result of the perception of itself in the capture of a world without. The conclusion: the intimate press of urban life requires of the individual a kind of calibration more subtle and challenging than either an enthusiastic sacrifice or a possessive grip.

Necessary to that calibration is the positioning of the subject within a multidimensional map of historical coordinates. Four different modes of transportation mingle in these lines; horse; steam; cable; and electric car each point toward a distinct historical origin. The "middle-aged man" is, like the historical period that shares his description, a distinctly transitional

figure, characterized by both a vital ruggedness ("in firm overalls") and its contrast, "infirm," "overall" bodily decline. The movements of his labor structure a kind of cruel future anterior, in which he perpetually ("continually") responds to the "gesture before last." The directional and temporal deictics ("In," "back," "before last") describe a labor in which each movement follows another, in debt as much to moments past as much as moments future. The steam-powered past of the nineteenth century opens and sharpens the earth to an "asphalt edge"; like the rhythms of the laborer, technology transforms the landscape.

Such juxtapositions assemble, in montage form, to produce the scene. Lyn Hejinian reminds us that "certainly Oppen was familiar with films generally (Oppen's father ran a string of movie theatres in San Francisco, and for a time Oppen had worked in one of them) and with the concept of the montage. . . . Oppen described ["Who comes"] as "a sort of 'montage,' . . . I'm jumping around like the fashionable camera of that time."[23] Indeed, montage becomes that method that allows for the poem to entertain the simultaneity of a wide array of historical developments, while also breaking up sentences of seamless temporal march. Oppen offers respite from the inevitability of the laborer's successive movements with a parenthetical deferral ("running cables"). The later-nineteenth-century innovation of "running cables" to facilitate mechanical movement jars against the alliterative flow of sliding, steaming, and swinging. The grammatical ambiguity of "running"—the cables are either being run by the operator, or they are simply running of their own accord—announces, too, their transitional status, portending the displacement of the laborer-operator.

Immediately before the poem proceeds to the widest of its historical coordinates—the horse and the electric car—the lyrical "I" reappears in an incomplete subjective phrase interrupted by the parenthetical question "how goes it?" This disruption of normative syntax pairs formally with the modern subject's unfulfilled desire to know how the machines of the asphalted future might run; a future whose structures inspire the question, "how goes it?" "If I" presents a precarious and provisional subject position, and the subjunctive mood recommends that the speaker adopt an experimental "if" comportment in the interest of calibrating self and surroundings. The orientation of this subject toward an emergent future of its own making will require its apprehension of the past's "horses" as a residual persisting in the shifting developments of the "electric" present.

In a 1968 interview discussing this poem, Oppen explained that the per-

ception of the coexistence of prior modes of production in the present produces a form of "double consciousness." The Duboisian concept is fascinatingly recruited to account for the ways in which perception alive to history defamiliarizes social surroundings:

> There's the asphalt but under it there's really what was, or even is, just a prairie, just the raw land. There's a double consciousness there where you see the road is a road then begin to see just the raw land. And the "Horse's classic height" is messed, I would say; "cartless" I just meant, and imagine on the prairie a horse, not a horse pulling a cart. Remember there were carts at the time, but not many. But just a plain horse.[24]

Oppen's gloss of the closing lines of "Who comes" elaborates a kind of *verfremdungseffekt*. Writing in "The A-effect as a Procedure in Everyday Life," Brecht describes a similar response to the apprehension of overlapping modes of production:

> An alienation of the motor-car takes place if after driving a modern car for a long while we drive an old model T Ford. Suddenly we hear explosions once more; the motor works on the principle of explosion. We start feeling amazed that such a vehicle, indeed any vehicle not drawn by animal-power, can move; in short, we understand cars, by looking at them as something strange, new, as a triumph of engineering and to that extent as something unnatural. Nature, which certainly embraces the motor-car, is suddenly imbued with an element of unnaturalness, and from now on this is an indelible part of the concept of nature.[25]

Oppen's emphasis on the "plain" horse's "cartlessness" registers the persistence of the preindustrial in the landscape of his contemporary moment. The "asphalt edge" has become loose, like the horse that grazes on the plain, and reveals the historical sedimentation that literally and figuratively subtends the present scene. If Brecht's alienation from nature was initiated by something as closely removed as a previous model car, then Oppen's horse would seem to have the power to produce even more radical forms of historicization. Moving from present (electric car), to past (steam shovel laborer), to recent past (running cable), to prehistory (horse on plateau) to the present again (electric burst), the paratactical presentation of human *technē* disrupts the developmentalist narrative of historical progress as a series of successive mechanical innovations. It appears that the speaker's accounting of surrounding social geographies—his waypoints are an individual laborer and a crowd that opposes him—necessarily entails, too, the registra-

tion of the theater of specifically social engagement, crowded with historical actors.

It is worth noting here that Fredric Jameson translates the A-effect as the "V-effect," calling attention to the idea that Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is intended as a perceptual problematic, a "making strange," or *estrangement* effect; as opposed to the "alienation" of *Entfremdung*. This is an important distinction, insofar as "alienation" in the historical materialist sense is less a perceptual problem (that is, a problem of reification) than a structural function of labor exploitation under the capitalist mode of production. What, we might ask, does the screening of such structures look like? [26]

In a 1969 interview with the American critic L. S. Dembo, Oppen remarks on the cinematic quality of the "Who Comes" poem: "In a way its more conventional than some of the other poems, I think, which is what I was objecting to a little bit. It's sort of a 'montage,' because there's just the city and I'm jumping around like the fashionable camera of the time."[27] When Dembo asks, "What would the prairie have to do with the city then?" Oppen replies, "It's there. It's just there, under the pavement. It is that ground." Interestingly, the poet characterizes the avant-garde cinematic technique of montage as "conventional." The poem, for Oppen, explores the diachronic sedimentations upon which even the most radical synchronic montages are grounded.

Oceans

Discrete Series is replete with such geographies as those explored in "Who comes." Paratactical compressions trace developmental simultaneity; nature, as we have seen, is as marbled with history as the urban spaces it abuts. The *Series*' preoccupation with ships at sea and the sea itself is symptomatic of the poem's engagement with what Neil Smith calls

> the production of nature. The idea of the production of nature is indeed paradoxical, to the point of sounding absurd, if judged by the superficial appearance of nature even in capitalist society. Nature is generally seen as precisely that which cannot be produced; it is an antithesis of human productive activity. It its most immediate appearance, the natural landscape presents itself to us as the material substratum of daily life, the realm of use-values [usefulness of something] rather than exchange-values [the value derived from the market sale of something]. As such it is highly differentiated along any number of axes. But with the progress of capital accumulation and the expansion of economic development,

> this material substratum is more and more the product of social production, and the dominant axes of differentiation are increasingly societal in origin. In short, when this immediate appearance of nature is placed in historical context, the development of the material landscape presents itself as a process of the production of nature.[28]

For the *Series*, the sea is precisely that space that is "paradoxically," and profoundly, produced by human development. Traditionally conceived of as a nonpolitical, murky primordium, the sea in the eyes of the *Series* professes its historical contours. "Party on Shipboard" addresses two converging worlds often seen as independently constituted: the social space of a ship and the sea as an expanse of asocial nature:

> PARTY ON SHIPBOARD
>
> Wave in the round of the port-hole
> Springs, passing,—arm waved,
> Shrieks, unbalanced by the motion—
> Like the sea incapable of contact
> Save in incidents (the sea is not
> water)
> Homogenously automatic—a green capped
> white is momentarily a half mile
> out—
> The shallow surface of the sea, this,
> Numerously—the first drinks—
> The sea is a constant weight
> In its bed. They pass, however, the sea
> Freely tumultuous.[29]

Oppen's sea-set studies explore oceanic spaces of confrontation. Opening with a homonym that unites nature and human action ("wave"), "Party on Shipboard" explores how the sea as both abstraction and particular attaches to the retina of lived experience. The wave appears within a frame: viewed through the porthole, it is demoted to the picturesque and severed from its relationship to the larger sea. Similarly, the shrieks of the party—their plurality individuated and militarized by the singular "arm waved"—are compared to (the *waves* of) the sea itself: each and all are "incapable of contact." The introduction of the simile ("like the sea") supplements and marks the homonym's inadequacy in merging bodies of people and water, while "inci-

dents" crystallize the ways in which "contact" between people, and between people and the sea, occurs in discrete moments whose intimate edges it is the poet's task to illume.

Through phonic and syntactical mirroring, Oppen establishes an ideational link between "wave in the round" and "save in incidents." The perceptual strategy of containment employed when confronting the whole of the sea—placing its wave *in* the round—unexpectedly picks open a more expansive view. Oppen emphasizes the discrete particularity of the wave, and aligns this initial perception with a picturesque, rather than a sublime, aesthetic. When the "wave in the round" is staged in its singularity, severed from its panorama, the sea is "incapable of contact save in incidents"—that is to say, the sea is incapable of contact "save"—except when apprehended as a series of particular incidents, or waves. Figured indirectly through its discretely rendered parts, "in incidents" and in several discrete "wave[s]" throughout the poem, the sea is a canvas for the materialist phenomenology of perception itself. The marriage of isolated "incidents" and framed "waves" stages the antinomial tension of every singular, local act of perception: the same perceptual process that defends against the freezing of the sea into a transcendent, sublime object also enables our conceptualization of the sea as a *Grundrissian* "concrete abstraction" constituted by apprehensible units. The sea is the dialectic of the watery molecules that constitute it; the whole and its particulars require one another for their constitution, but neither is reducible to the other.

The second half of the poem makes manifest the sociality of the sea: it is at once "homogenously automatic" and "freely tumultuous." The sea continues to be perceived in the particular "moments," when "a green capped white is momentarily a half mile out—." The poem links the perceptual parceling of the sea's contents to that *social* separation that subtends all of these practices of apprehension: the party drinks together but as individuals, "numerously." In all, Oppen represents our intake of each other and the world around us as a deeply contradictory process involving simultaneously expansive and focalizing tendencies, a process constantly fluctuating between the predictable (the "homogenously automatic") and the contingent ("the freely tumultuous"). These vagaries are measured against the sea's constancy. The concept of the sea, as Oppen suggests with the final echo of the deictic "in," of "in its bed," is a strategically domesticated abstraction, rendered ahistorical so that society's historical flux might be charted against its wild contrast.

Regarding "Party on Shipboard," Oppen remarks: "I was really kind of moved to see I'd written a statement, and a very clear one, of what I was going in search of when I quit writing—the Party on Ship-board" and, ". . . I try to get to humanity as a single thing, as something like a sea which is a constant weight in its bed—the last quoted from Discrete Series."[30] Here Oppen reveals to be true what we might have guessed: that the poem's "Party" is both metaphorical—a vehicle for the tenor of "humanity"—and a literal allusion to the Communist Party itself, whose organization might provide the singularity Oppen "went in search of" when he stopped writing in order to become an *engagé*. The poem is situated at a political threshold; it points to a utopian future in which the Party is the expression of a direct, post-representative democracy, even as it marks a past in which, for Oppen, writing and action are incommensurable.

Oppen's ships furnish an experimental space where both Husserlian phenomenological reduction and Marxian social observation are possible; the sea's dual status as social diorama and isolated landscape resolves these two often opposing analytic comportments. The vessels, in effect, merge modern cultures of labor and pleasure with the seemingly transhistorical permanence of the sea's enduring rhythms. Oppen's seascapes pose a difficult question: is the individual subject disappeared by that sea and society; by nature as well as nomothesis? For these poems-at-sea, the answer is yes. In the anti-egoic subjects they posit, individual perception unites with a deeply collective historical experience. This subject is frequently initially absent from the scenes that it observes; it waits in the anteroom while the scene is set, only to enter later into an equal partnership with the other materials of the geographies it populates. The following portrait of a ship is structured thusly:

> The mast
> Inaudible soars; bole-like, tapering:
> Sail flattens from it beneath the wind.
> The limp water holds the boat's round
> sides. Sun
> Slats dry light on the deck.
> Beneath us glide
> Rocks, sand, and unrimmed holes.[31]

The subject appears only in the penultimate line, denoted by the plural, "us," much like when a filmmaker waits patiently before turning the camera

on herself. Even before it appears as collective subject ("us"), the subject's viewpoint is multiple, represented by a series of universal, cinematic, and de-individuated perceptions; it sees vertically and totally, from mast to sea bottom. Various angles grant temporality and movement to the object, which Oppen presents though a perceptual montage, systematizing, without sacrificing, the multiplicity of the modern eye, gone cinematic.

The final two lines merge eye and sea. The curious "unrimmed holes" that close the poem appear as echoic contrasts to the porthole image of the "Wave in the round" poem. In a 1976 letter Oppen writes that "rims" refer to the human eye.[32] In light of this information, the "unrimmed holes" come to signal a perceptual abyss. They are eyeless holes that capture the impossible, ontic blindness of the ocean floor; in its depths we find nature without persons and history. These "holes" mark the subject's recognition of its own perceptual borders. Such sober accountings of the limits to subjective freedom testify not only to the antiromantic materialism of *Discrete Series* overall but also to the robustness of its anticapitalist fantasy in which nature might exist unmolested and unacquired.

The unrimmed holes of "The mast" poem occupy that place where imagination replaces observation; likewise, the following installment in the *Series* submerges its underwater camera to explore that which cannot be seen directly:

Bolt
In the frame
Of the building—
A ship
Grounds
Her immense keel
Chips
A stone
Under fifteen feet
Of harbor
Water—
The fiber of this tree
Is live wood
Running into the
Branches and leaves
In the air.[33]

Words glitter by turns as both nouns and verbs: *bolt, grounds, chips, branches, leaves.* This doubling of doing and being restores action to object, and in doing so generates a poetic strategy from that long-standing materialist heuristic that stresses the labor process behind the thing. "Bolt," for example, is both the action of bolting and the object holding together the ship; it is also a command, an energetic hortative animating objects that only appear severed from their origins in motion. The invisible content of labor appears at the summons of such formal exuberances.

Consider how early avant-gardist cinematographers parried the reification of image and object. For example, while the cinematic frame of Dziga Vertov's "Kino Eye" momentarily isolates its images from a broader context, its montages reveal the interconnectedness of objects and actions, and of persons and history. Similarly, Oppen invests the images of Imagism with movement and relational holism. "Bolt In the frame/Of the building" presents a matryoshka doll of embedded objects, bound together successively by deictics providing increasing locational precision: *in* the frame *of* the building. This opening phrase evinces cinematic logic: first "frame," then relate.[34]

Oppen makes legible on the page what cannot be seen directly. We discover the bolt in the building, the keel chipping the stone beneath the water, and later, the fiber within the tree. The poem possesses a tripartite structure, each component of which it strives to stitch together: the building of the ship, the ship itself, vertically articulated, and the tree from which the ship is fashioned. In its exfoliation of interior dynamisms unavailable to the eye, the poem asserts the principle of objectification—where, as Zukofsky would have it, the object is coaxed to "rest" momentarily so that we might explore the "totality" of its constitution and parts. The closing image of the tree provides us with such a moment. The wooden boat itself is revealed to be living and in motion, composed of the wood of a tree that grows as vibrantly into the "air" as the ships keel plunges downward into the sea "fifteen feet below." The concluding noun-verbs, "branches" and "leaves," revivify the dead labor and materials that give the boat its spine and structure.

As we have seen, the *Series* trains its Kino Eye on the labor processes effaced by the commodity form, and on the natural world assimilated into the world of capital. In the *Series*, de-reification is not simply a matter of exercising a more penetrative gaze. Rather, de-reification is a comparative process by which the subject aligns formal similarities of particulars from

different contexts to grasp the specificity of each in its own situation. Because the similarities between building, ship, and tree are evoked on the level of form, rather than the level of manifest content, the poem retains the discrete and distinctive context of each object, while still emphasizing the universality of reification's effects on the screening of the object-world.

Gendered Particulars: *Discrete Series* and the Contradictory Forms of Modernist Masculinity

Discrete Series is rigorously sensitive to the reifying film that envelops all objects of perception. Yet its poems are also committed—and here we meet again the aesthetic-political utopian impulse of Objectivism in general—to developing perception as a conscious, material practice capable of dissolving the ideological opacity of these reified relations. When confronting those reifications special to gender, Oppen's work bears a somewhat less proud imprint of its historical moment of emergence. The persistence and centrality of ideologies of gender within the works of male modernists is well documented.[35] Pound's quasi-pathological depictions of what he understood to be the (Semitic and) feminine principle in "Portrait d'une Femme," along with Eliot's continual lamentations of the emasculations endemic to the cultures of modernity in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and in the prose-poem "Hysteria," exemplify, rather famously, a trajectory of some modernists' rightward ideological treatments of gender.[36] The attitudes of other male modernists in the canon are more contradictory, but no less problematic. From James Joyce's Molly Bloom as a principle of openness, fecundity, and pleasure, to W. C. Williams's uncorseted object of desire in "The Young Housewife," and his natural, earthy addressee in "Portrait of a Lady," each and all suggest that even modernists generally considered to be populist and progressive operate within a rather confined and predictable terrain of gendered antinomies.

The specificity of Objectivism—its formal innovations, its ideological positions—is produced in part by its inventive sublations of the aesthetic and political customs of both the right and the left. Such sublations, however, do not provide an inoculation against history; Objectivism maintains an at once intimate and critical relationship to the imperatives of modernist aesthetics with which it is in conversation. The *Series*' formal and ideational approaches to gender have a similar, perhaps even more exceptionally complex relationship to the rather narrow spectrum of white male modernist attitudes toward this question. Poems about women, and about sex with

women, make up about a fourth of *Discrete Series*. Just as one can locate the effects of Imagism and realism on the poems' formal practices, the strains of masculine attitudes resembling those of canonical modernism, both right and left of center, are also plainly identifiable.

The serial form of *Discrete Series* elaborates content-meaning as a comparative process; each poem constellates anew as the *Series* unfolds, its significance recursively, perpetually, altered. Oppen's women poems are no exception. For example, the final of three contiguous poems dealing with women historicizes the forms of the first two, and offers insight into the poet's self-ironizing masculinist aesthetic. The first two poems, "No interval of manner" and "O city ladies," confront one another, *face à face*, in immediate succession. Each poem's approach to the "woman question" diverges wildly from its neighbor's. The first, with its recognizably modern, feminist subject begins, against Joycean affirmations of "yes yes," with a negation:

No interval of manner
Your body in the sun.
You? A solid, this that the dress
insisted,
Your face unaccented, your mouth a mouth?
Practical knees:
It is you who truly
Excel the vegetable,
The fitting of grasses—more bare than
that.
Pointedly bent, your elbow on a car-edge
Incognito as summer
Among mechanics.[37]

A photograph of a woman leaning against a car provides the material for this poem.[38] Objectivism, it might be said, confronts the conundrum common to any left avant-gardist going in fear of abstractions: appearances often obscure history, but poesis represents history itself through appearances and images. The female figure of this poem is twice mediated, once by still camera, and once again by language, and through the layering of these representational media, her image testifies against fictions of immediacy. The interrogative "you?" signals the poet's indirection, which proceeds carefully in its interrogation of the photograph form that always beguiles with its bashful, incredulous objectivity. The woman's "body in the sun" offers up her

material contours, but exteriority and interiority, or appearance and essence, are parsed apart in the *Series*' poetic economy; the body and the subject "you" are not easily reconciled. The poem notes that the woman's dress, in painterly fashion, defines her against the landscape, and she is made "solid" not by what she is, but by what she is not. The tense alternating proximity of the deictics, "this, that," crystallizes the progressive male modernist's contradictory desires: to perceive immediately ("this") and to describe ("that") the woman through material markers that are always-already thick with gendered, ideological mediations. To guard against such fantasies of immediacy, Oppen approaches the female subject askance. When the object of perception is a woman, as opposed to a boat, a building, or a tree, the *Series* heightens the tension it maintains between the reified world and its perception by a critical eye. Grammatically, "this" and "that" refer to the same "solid"; by creating a syntactical moment of identity through difference, the poet attempts to bridge the ideological divide between the woman as he sees her, and the woman as she "is . . . truly."

The woman's beauty is described as without artifice. Indeed, her actions are as unroutinized and unmannered ("no interval of manner") as her face is "unaccented." It is here that Oppen asks whether language itself can retain its power to name, if what it is naming is shorn of the markings of gender. Can the woman's mouth still be called a mouth if it is unmediated by accents; if it is not "made up"? The word "unaccented," with its suggestion of voice unmarked by regional difference, lends further anonymity. This disindividuation links registers of spatiality and gender and in doing so emphasizes the truly catholic topographies of regimes of sexual comportment. In short, the poet is careful not to collapse the woman's subjectivity ("you?") with the gendered markings of her appearance. However, unmarking his subject in turn proves frustrating to his attempts to shape an aesthetic sensitive to the woman embodied before him.

Indeed, the poet's urge to dereify the woman's image leads him to increasingly disarticulate his subject/object: his final focus rests on her "practical knees" and her "pointedly bent" elbow. Her knees are found in excess ("excelling") of the natural world. "Practical needs" sounds behind "practical knees," symptomatic of the poem's desire to ascribe the body to the realm of use, rather than exchange, value. This rather cubist arrangement of body parts counterintuitively occasions recognition, finally begetting a direct address: "it is you." A recurrent inadequation between body and context (here knee and grass) trumps interchangeable equivalence or rhythmic alignment:

it appears that an ethics of nonfungibility informs Oppen's adaptation of the *Series*' formal practices to a gendered subject.

The commonplace adequation of the closing lines, which compares the woman with summer, would, in and of itself, suggest a comforting closure of tensions. Against this, Oppen parodies the often easy affirmations of the simile form. While the simile typically offers an interceding impresario meant to compress the distance between the reader and the object of comparison, the woman here is pointedly not like the summer, but rather "Incognito as summer"—that is to say, still unknown. Oppen's simile links the "unknown" and "masked" senses of "incognito" with the natural seasonal plenitude offered by "summer." This pairing signposts the limits of the attempted rupture of gendered descriptive practices: while within the contradictory logic of the poem the woman must be naturalized, the simile suggests that the woman can never be understood if she is naturalized.

An allusion to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reinforces the tension between the desire to apprehend the woman "truly" and the tendency to ascribe that "truth" to the realm of nature. The woman in question is "Incognito as summer / Among mechanics." The invocation of the *Dream*'s gender-queering disguises reflects Oppen's desire to place the poem within a literary-aesthetic history that ludically reinscribes the mores of gender on a palette of fantasy. Shakespeare's "rude mechanicals" become Oppen's "mechanics"; the metal machinery of the automobile with which the woman is pictured substitutes for the troupe of laborer-players. Shakespeare provides a generative literary prehistory that illuminates the poem's closing—and never fully articulated—suspicion that nature ("summer") is the modality through which gender, as igcognito play, is lived.

The Renaissance weaves the connective tissue that binds this poem to the next in the series, "'O City Ladies,'" whose opening citation, as Oppen notes in a 1980 interview, is drawn from Ben Jonson:

'O city ladies'
Your coats wrapped,
Your hips a possession

Your shoes arched
Your walk is sharp

Your breasts
        Pertain to lingerie

The fields are road-sides,
Rooms outlast you.[39]

Modernists of both left and right ideological tendencies found in the figure of the urban woman of leisure the pathological symptoms of modern capitalism: alienation, commodification, and conspicuous consumption.[40] Oppen, as we have seen, is far from immune to these problematic gendered figurations. To this end, several elements of this poem offer much to the feminist critic in pursuit of the specific coordinates of Oppenian masculinity: the position of the poem within *Discrete Series*; its formal curiosities; and its citation of Jonson's *Poetaster*, a text central to the Renaissance War of the Theatres.

The opening line of Oppen's poem is spoken in Jonson's play by the character Crispinus, who is a caricature of Jonson's rival John Marston.[41] In the play, Crispinus takes a pill that makes him vomit up his prodigious store of lengthy, pretentious vocabulary. Oppen's citation invokes a familiar gendered alignment: the overburdened shopper offers a feminine mediation of subavant-garde prolix. Here gendered, consumerist excess is identified with the bodily effluvium of Marston's lesser arts. To complicate matters, the citation also operates as a self-reflexive commentary on Oppen's own poetic practice. Where Crispinus is a comical figure unaware of his own obscurity and verbal folly, Oppen ventriloquizes through his allusion a kind of strategic self-deflation mournfully—and knowingly—worrying over reproducing a gendering aesthetics. Reinscribing sexual commonplaces as he troubles the voice that utters them, Oppen simultaneously reratifies gender codes and purposively limns the ideological boundaries of even his moment's most progressive male modernist imaginations.

"O City Ladies" participates in another Renaissance tradition, that of the *blason*, insofar as it addresses its female subject's parts in discrete and disarticulated fashion ("Your coats"; Your hips"; "Your shoes"; "Your walk"; "Your breasts").[42] In some protest to such formal histories, the genitive anaphora "your" gestures at returning ownership of the body in both its sartorial and elemental guises to the woman herself. However, the repatriation of body to subject is not uncomplicated; when hips and shoes range together under the abstraction of "possession," the tyranny of equivalence renders the body itself fungible. Whatever agency might be detected in the defensive habitus of commodity acquisition is extinguished by the too hasty identification of things and subject. Indeed, these commodities no longer

merely describe but rather define the "city lady." The active verbs "wrap" and "possess" take adjectival form, and suggest, in their past participle modality, the congealment of activity into object. The body of the woman, like the dead labors that adorn it, is overmastered by the persevering forces of nature and history, and even domestic spaces ("rooms") "outlast" her. The poem's final lines depict a developmental landscape in which even the most social of structures—rooms—appear as things beyond history, pointing toward a deathless, irrevocable future. The fate of nature seems similarly foretold, but for destruction rather than triumphant eternities, when "the fields are [but] road-sides," buttresses for the arteries of progress.

We have been tracing the ways in which certain poems within *Discrete Series* employ, if self-critically, figures of women as indices of historical transition and aesthetic transformation. It will become increasingly clear, in the following analyses, that the feminine prevents Oppen's avant-gardism from breeching the historical horizons of thinkability. The following untitled poem, which immediately precedes "No Interval of Manner" and "O City Ladies," offers a prismatic example of gender barbing the boundaries of language and thought. Below, the compasses of canon formation, periodization, and historical memory entwist around representations of women:

> Fragonard,
> Your spiral women
> By a fountain
>
> '1732'
>
> Your picture lasts thru us
> its air
> Thick with succession of civilizations;
> And the women.[43]

Addressed to the painter whose works became within the space of his own lifetime both exemplary and obsolete, the poem traces the historical fate of Fragonard's *The Fountain of Love* (c. 1785). The date of the Rococo artist's birth ("'1732'") hinges between the poem's apostrophic account of the painting and its afterlife in the retentive capillaries of collective life ("thru us"). Scare quotes distantiate empty calendar time from lived and living history; a date carries meaning only in its relational attachment to a long history of aesthetic production and reception. Remarking upon the painter's willful stylization of "spiral women" and rather typical scenes "by a fountain,"

Oppen emphasizes that however proprietary and singular an aesthetic may be ("your" is repeated), only its later collective reception ensures permanence. The colloquial "thru" insists on the power of contemporary historical reception, as opposed to an aesthetic eidos ferried inexorably by historical currents, to grant the aesthetic work meaning and relevance.

The closing lines present an ideologically and formally complex couplet in which desire pairs formally with historical change. This pairing charges Fragonard's painting with the "thick" frisson of endless fat over endless lean, layered oil tints that build the foundation for the painting's renewed erotic press. Tropes of tumescence converge with the forces of accumulated histories to project upon the painting a "thickness" of air. The final fragment, at first glance, seems to suggest that "the women" might contribute, too, to this overdetermined density. Problematically, however, a semicolon forecloses this potential reworking of history and hardness and "women" appear as a dangling remainder of both; a dangerous supplement to the *Series*' self-conscious historicism.

The poem thus identifies several simultaneous historical vectors of which the painting is a prism. *Discrete Series* is concerned to differentiate between historical data and its presentation; between historical contents and their forms. Fragonard's work is at once contemporary-banal, future-anticipatory and historical-anachronistic, and its reception in the present carries the imprimatur of that unevenness. The final couplet emphasizes that the realization of the artwork's semantic fullness in the present requires such historical density. The artifacts of the past become part of a long continuous present, and the woman and her form function as the expression of the enduring ideological and aesthetic legacies that provide tenuous but tenacious hanging bridges between the vicissitudes of history. The "women's" vexing and enduring cohabitation of the margins of aesthetic production and the center of aesthetic objectification mediates our access to the fluctuating historicity of the art object itself. Here, the feminine, like the sea that is "constant in its bed," functions as the ahistorical foil without which the uneven aggregations of history would remain indiscernible.

Conclusion: Self-Reflexivity and Art as Historical Particular

Consider the following, which compares the overarching shape of *Discrete Series*—a heady embrace of futurally oriented, femininely aleatory individual poems by an ordered, deliberate, and successive serial temporal structure—to the experience of modernity itself:

Written structure,
Shape of art,
More formal
Than a field would be
(existing in it)—
Her pleasure's
Looser;
'O—'

'Tomorrow?'—

Successive
Happenings
(the telephone)[44]

"Written structure" compares the more structured, formal severity of art to the "field," which, as we've seen in "O city ladies," is *Discrete Series*' figure for formless, precapitalist, undeveloped potentiality. The superlative description of "written structure," which is "more formal than a field would be," heralds the overmastering presence of the poet's imagination, which presides over a speculative abstraction of the absent field. The field potentiates in both the material and the ideational sense. The parenthetical "existing in it" enacts the process of form-making, which is not mimetic but rather casts a new world against an imagined "would be" one retroactively installed upon a premodern past. In Williamsesque fashion, the aesthetic acts of the imagination conjure in real time: the field is actually made to "exist" through the "written structure" of poetic formalization.

"Her pleasure" has a somewhat contradictory relationship to the preceding willful significations. "Looser" suggests that the erotic, like the field, is a site of preformal possibility. "'O—'" however, implies that this pleasure lays an ontological claim to the development of language itself. A lyric form that recurs throughout the history of poetry, "'O—'" conjoins spoken language and "written structure." By linking this oral morpheme with women's pleasure, the poem offers that gendered eros is the alpha of form: its merging of utterance and linguistic system represents, by turns, the organic, and gender-ideological, prehistory of form itself. As in the Fragonard poem, women constitute a kind of historical supplement. The progressive modernist here represents them as peripheral forms constitutive of the whole history of poetics, and thus the prehistory of his own.

These erotics that constellate around the pleasure of the "'O—'" introduce the historical present, and offer a further meta-commentary on the structure of *Discrete Series* as a whole. The decontextualized interrogative 'tomorrow?' whose assonance is an immediate echo of "'O—'" connects this history of poetic form and aesthetic-erotic pleasure to the experience of modernity's temporalities. The temporal questioning of 'tomorrow?' anticipates the future, yet self-consciously remarks upon its anticipation with an uncertain address, bound to its own present. Similarly, modern historical time is described as "successive/happenings,"—that is, the expanded time of the contemporary unfolds in the episodic seriality, 'successive' in nature, of discrete events or 'happenings.' This concluding poem, then, speaks to the larger poetic structure within which it appears: the poem asserts a strong structural homology between the form of *history* in modernity—whose totality unfolds as a series of discrete particulars—and the form of *Discrete Series*, whose poetically constructed temporality stages totality as a series of poetic "incidents," as in "Party on Shipboard," or here, in "successive happenings."

The poem writes this prehistory of its own formalizing aesthetics as the uneven history of forms of communication, from "written structure," to "(the telephone)." If "written structure" gives "shape" to Oppen's "art," that is, to the poem and to *Discrete Series* itself, this still-emergent modern technology of the tele-*phonic* with which Oppen concludes the poem occasions the poetry's revisiting of the lyric mode's originating moment, in the "O—" of orality, and in the passionate expression of interior affect. The telephone's materialization of utterance contracts both the space and time of expression: the speaker's "O" can be heard at its exclamatory moment and can travel at the speed of sound across the landscapes between subjects. Yet, as figured in relation to "written structure," this technological innovation is revealed simultaneously to depend upon, and to reinforce, the expansion of space and time between these subjects. Appearing as one of the "successive happenings" of modernity, the "(telephone)" both forecasts an innovation in forms of expression and a return to the preformal immediacy of orality. This doubled movement of the poem—moving from the *technē* of writing to the *technē* of the telephone, while simultaneously moving from the writing of poetry to its prehistory in oral utterance—envisions a contemporary moment comprised of the uneven overlap of prior modes of production and of prior cultural forms. Oppen's telephone thus estranges the "written structure" of poetry, and is itself estranged by the written structure of Oppen's

poetry. The bookends of "written structure" and "telephone" formally set that originary, superlative, "looser" moment of gendered orality free both from history, and less ecstatically and more problematically, from the social legibility "writing" and "speaking" (*pace* Blessingbourne) affords.

The poem, it must be said, meets the limits of its freedom from ideological pressures when it aligns formlessness with "looser" femininity and, by contrast, its own forms of "successive happenings" with technological advance. Yet its closing particular, the telephone, suggests that an ontology of feminine voice provides the secret prehistory of advances in the sound technologies that seek to overcome the cleft of society by geographical space. When Oppen suggests that we "listen to women," what does he expect us to hear? Or, like the commodity, if women could talk, what would they say? The answer is problematically utopian: all emerging forms, artistic and technological, will to order that feminine, desirous entropic space of "'O—'" It is an ontology that begins not in labor but pleasure and represents the *Series*' unorthodox, sexed rehumanization of its world.

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3 Zukofsky
The Voice of the Fetish

Beyond "First Generation" Modernism: Objectivism's Red Wedge

Throughout the mid-1930s, Pound and Zukofsky carried on a sometimes congenial, sometimes explosive epistolary relationship. They debated, among other things, the nature of the commodity form; the political stakes and ideological underpinnings of anti-Semitism; the role of the poet in the public sphere; and the nature and direction of historical transformation in the era of capitalist production, which we have been thus far calling "modernity." Their exchange portended an aesthetic and ideological rupture, transatlantically articulated, within international literary modernism. While Pound's political and aesthetic dispositions have been well documented, history has only recently returned to Zukofsky's anticapitalist modernism. This chapter recuperates the formal hermeneutics of Zukofsky's Depression-era Marxist work, and explores, in particular, the commodity and its critique as structuring architectures of Objectivist poetics.

Even as Marjorie Perloff affirms a break between first and second modernism, she writes that "a certain sense of belatedness . . . haunts Zukofsky's production."[1] Drawing a rather stark boundary between Objectivism and "proletarian" poets (scare quotes in original), Perloff's critical narrative offers us a sanitized, and de-leninized, Zukofsky. In this critical narrative, Zukofsky becomes a comforting harbinger of postmodern aesthetic ideals, a bellwether of "the shift that takes place at the turn of the decade . . . from the modernist preoccupation with *form* in the sense of imagistic or symbolist structure, dominated by a lyric "I," to the questioning of *representation* itself . . . [in this shift] the boundaries between the "real" and the "fantastic" become oddly blurred.[2] By some contrast, Charles Bernstein emphasizes an intensification of fidelity to history and its transformations: "second-wave

modernism may be understood in this context as part of a continuing struggle to reinvent modernism for present times and present conditions, often in specific response to challenges posed by first-wave modernists. Its technical innovations are an ongoing witness and adjustment to the social dislocation and relocations of contemporaneity, the pressure of reality."[3]

In the spirit of Bernstein's commentary, we find that the following exchange between Zukofsky and Pound reveals the deep and irreparable differences that subtended the epistemological break within modernism and signaled the beginning of the Zukofsky era. In response to Pound's accusation that Zukofsky mistakenly applies the concept of the commodity to human labor, Zukofsky writes: "There's more material fact and imaginative poetic handling of fact in that first chapter of Marx than has been guessed at in your economic heaven." Pound's own position is expressed with characteristic causticity:

> You bloody buggaring fool/Have you not even enough sense to USE A WORD with a meaning and let the meaning adhere to that word. A commodity is a material thing or substance/it has a certain durability. If you don't dissociate ideas, and keep ONE LABEL for ONE thing of category, you will always be in a gormy mess. Labour may transmute material, it may put value into it, or make it serviceable. I suppose it comes of being a damn foreigner and not having bothered to learn english.[4]

Pound begins with the classical bourgeois economists' empiricist assertion that labor cannot be a commodity because it is not a durable good. He furthermore establishes an ideational link between a putative organic adequacy of signifier to signified ("use a word with meaning and let meaning adhere to that word") and the material immediacy of the commodity object. In this regard, he maintains a fidelity to pre-Kantian thought; upon observation, things confess their concepts. For Pound, labor is a supplement acting upon this world of preexisting things.

Zukofsky responds by suggesting that Pound actually read Marx, here "Charlie": "You can still read Charlie and find out for yourself why labor is the basic commodity (if that word is to have any consequential meaning itself) and how the products of labor are just the manifestations, and money yr. capitalistic juggling, of that commodity." Later Zukofsky exclaims: "Yr. English language (private pauperty!)!"[5] For Zukofsky, following Marx, labor itself is a commodity to be bought and sold. Commodity *goods* are "manifestations" of the labor process that leads to their production. In a characteris-

tically Marxian play on words, Zukofsky exploits the multiple and contradictory valences of "manifestation": an indication of material existence (in this case, of labor); the materialized form of a spirit; and, more wryly, a political demonstration. In the first sense of "manifestation," the object mediates all access to the labor process obscured by the structural effects of commodification described "in that first chapter by Marx." In the second sense, the commodity gives material form to that realm of labor spiritualized by Pound as but a transmuter, or transubstantiator, of things. In the third and most ecstatic sense, the things themselves are capable of collective action in the form of political demonstration. It is this last sense that will find its aesthetic articulation in *"A"*—9, to which we turn later in this Chapter. As Zukofsky's play on "manifestation" points up, Pound's reduction of the "meaning" of the word "commodity" to that which can be experienced or observed directly precludes him from counting labor among those materials bought and sold. Zukofsky, then, complicates the most common sense of manifestation as a plain demonstration by insisting on the mediated nature of appearances that only seem immediate and directly available. In his description of the commodity fetish, Marx remarks that the apparent simplicity of the commodity's *form of appearance* obscures the "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" that attend its construction.[6] Zukofsky's evocative use of "manifestations" corroborates Marx on this question; his rebuke of Pound is, in the main, a warning that beneath immediacy lies concealed and mystified content.

Later in his reply, Zukofsky remarks on the privilege that attends Pound's semantic pragmatism, asking "or has English become so natural to you that you no longer bother to weigh each word you handle, translate, etc. The damn foreigner you say I am has more respect for English than you have."[7] While Pound connects the putatively unmediated registers of signification with his account of the commodity's material immediacy, Zukofsky teases out the intervening social fabric that structures the forms of both language and labor. For Zukofsky, the appearance of immediacy is a nefarious epiphenomenon of the naturalization of ethnically purified, molecular racialism of "English" itself. Against Pound's nativist invocation of national citizenship as the condition of possibility for participating in an exclusive realm of unmediated signification, Zukofsky suggests that language is not the "private pauperty" of a privileged subject but rather a material medium through which any subject might articulate itself. The "damned foreign" modernist Zukofsky—writing from the United States to the expatriate Pound in Italy—diagnoses the immanence of meaning as a symptom of the unvigilant com-

placency of the "native" speaker. Elevating Pound's invective in *Portrait d'une Femme* ("Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you") to an artistic principle, the Objectivist poet prefers the insights afforded by his social dispossession to the propertied rights of the native speaker.[8]

As this exchange makes plain, Objectivism emerged out of the ideological-aesthetic foreclosures of the Pound era. No single factor can account for its epistemological and aesthetic break with first-generation modernism. Rather, a matrix of interdependent issues reflective of modernity's broad polarizations sounded at its birth: racism and racialization; ideologies of citizenship and native right; opposing theories of representation, economics, and culture. All these, and more, facets of modernity's political economy converged to introduce a red wedge between Objectivism and it precursors.[9]

Antagonistic Forms

At the heart of the Zukofskian project is the desire to resolve the tensions between high modernism's contradictory commitments to immediate data and to a robust, often mythical or religious, capaciousness in what he calls "a rested totality."[10] To do so, the poet must first attend to the double nature of "objectivity," which brings into contact the data of "things" and the moment of their emergence from an unseen totality. As Marx explains, the commodity is as much an objective fact as it is objectively mystified by the invisibility of the labor congealed within it. The capitalist social relations that structure our perception of the commodity, argues Marx, conceal this labor. Neither empiricist nor transcendent, Zukofsky's poetics hold in productive tension the experience of direct perception and the sober knowledge that that experience is always everywhere corralled and conditioned by the commodity's form of appearance.[11]

In the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx describes the structure of equivalence between money and the commodity.[12] In his explication, the money form enacts a permanent contradiction: as the commodity becomes a use value for the buyer, it also exists, Janus-faced, as exchange value for the seller. Money maintains this contradiction in a continuous loop: as soon as the commodity attains the appearance of immediacy and use-value for one exchanger, it is mediated by exchange value for the other. This double movement captures the similarly doubled nature of objectivity in a singular moment, as the immediacy of the commodity is simultaneously a mystified form of appearance and an "objective" part of a world structured by capitalist exchange. We will see how Zukofsky's poetic forms maintain the per-

spective of both sides of the exchange described by Marx: the immediacy of the commodity's use-value, and the necessarily mediated expression of that value in ideological forms such as money. Zukofsky's poetics must wield a two-pronged response, to the antinomies of first-generation high modernism, and to the ideological foreclosures of the commodity regime.

Rather famously, Zukofsky's *"A"—9* uses the canzone form to give voice to the commodity itself. In doing so, he writes a poetic enactment of Marx's well-known statement in chapter 3 of *Capital*: "Could commodities themselves speak, they would say: Our use-value may be a thing that interests men. It is no part of us as objects. What, however, does belong to us as objects, is our value. Our natural intercourse as commodities proves it. In the eyes of each other we are nothing but exchange values."[13] Zukofsky directs Marx's rhetorical play into the basis for a poetics that leaps through and over the perspectivalist subjectivism traditionally associated with the lyric form. The commodities' unified collective voice takes the place of the individual lyricist, restoring the root word chant, ecstatic, plural and political, to the canzone.

The sudden compressed intricacy of the canzone form, intervening between otherwise paratactical and typographically sprawling sections of *"A,"* draws the reader's attention to the equally tightly soldered formal filigree of the commodity's shell. As Slavoj Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* shows in his elaboration of the methodological intimacies between Marx and Freud, "The 'secret' to be unveiled through critical hermeneutics is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities; the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the 'secret' of . . . form itself*."[14] While Zukofsky will indeed exhaustively detail the social interiority of the commodity in the perversely systematic canzones that follow, it is worth pausing here to note that the form of *"A"—9* does even more than corrugate the Braille of that social content. His self-published explanatory notes to the poem, entitled "First Half of "A"—9," cite Pound's description of the "Form" of the canzone (distantiating scare quotes Zukofsky's) as inspiration. An ornate calculus testifies to the autonomous intensities of the canzone's form:

> The "Form"
>
> "E Pound has explained Guido's Donna Mi Prega as follows: "The canzone was to the poets of this period what the fugue was to musicians in Bach's time. It is a highly specialized form, having its own self- imposed limits . . . The strophe . . . consist(s) of four parts, the second lobe equal to the first as required by the rules

of the canzone; and the fourth happening to equal the third, which is not required by the rules as Dante explains them.

"Each strophe is articulated by 14 terminal and 12 inner rhyme sounds, which means that 52 out of every 154 syllables are bound into pattern. The strophe reverses the proportions of the sonnet, as the short lobes precede the longer. This reversal is obviously of advantage to the strophe as part of a longer composition."

(Each strophe uses 8 rhyme sounds: 5 occur 4 times, and 3 twice.)

The first half of "A"—9 follows this pattern exactly.[15]

Zukofsky's adherence to these formal demands scores the poet's labor into the canzone form, and in doing so upsets the canzone's historically auratic aesthetic value. In the place of such value, the canzone englyphs labor value; visual, oral, and aural symmetries and patterns semaphore the poet's work.

Frankfurt Schooler and historical contemporary of Zukofsky's Alfred Sohn-Rethel describes Marx's epistemological break with traditional political economists as precisely this turn to the value form of labor. Sohn-Rethel argues that historical materialism produces a question previously occluded by the epistemological and ideological foreclosures of political economics. The bourgeois political economists, he writes via a citation from Marx, "never asked the question why this content has assumed the particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product."[16] Zukofsky's canzone provokes a similar question: why enrobe the commodity in the peculiar antiquities of the canzone?

Set against the broader currents of modernism, *"A"*—9 appears, at first, to share the formal tendencies symptomatic of earlier avant-gardes of the twentieth century. As was noted in chapter 1, Perry Anderson has argued, in his account of modernism's historical conjuncture, that modernists often expressed anti-bourgeois sentiments in what he calls the "still-usable" cultural forms of the ancien régime. One need only look to Eliot's preoccupation with Metaphysical poetry, or Pound's troubadours, or Wallace Stevens's lyric-acerbic Romanticism to see the vast ideological and aesthetic range of the ways in which modernists remediated the archaic. Despite its apparently similar uptake of past forms, is there a way we might conceive of Zukofsky's canzones as a movement beyond this particular modernist tendency? To this end, let us suppose that the canzone's aesthetic value is not in excess of the artistic labor congealed therein. Such collapsing of the mem-

brane between aesthetic value and labor value requisitions art for an aesthetic economy separate and distinct from that of the commodity form, whose ungrooved patina wants to preserve the split between an object's shell and its casting. In using Cavalcanti's medieval form to depose an autonomous aesthetic value preserved in part by its birth in a precapitalist past, Zukofsky cracks the mantle of the commodity's surface. Summoning past forms no longer affirms their value apart from the artist's labor; instead these forms serve an avant-garde negation of exchange-value logic that is revolutionary, proleptic, and Marxist in nature.

In his *Ghostlier Demarcations,* Michael Davidson discusses the political and aesthetic significance of the canzone form for Pound in an important chapter, "Dismantling 'Mantis': Reification and Objectivist Poetics":

> In his essay that accompanies his first translation (1934), Pound reflects on the loss of the "radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies" exemplified in general by late medieval Mediterranean culture in general and in specific by Cavalcanti's (perhaps heretical) philosophical poetry (*Literary Essays 154*). It is this association of Cavalcanti with the "radiant world" of enduring values that provokes the poem's second appearance in 1935 as Canto 36, this time to validate the "clean edge" of historical destiny as embodied by Mussolini. In this second version, the canzone stands as a salutary alternative to the wastage of "Mitteleuropa" presented in the previous canto. In Canto 35, Pound had paid particular attention to the ill effects of international Jewry, warning of "the intramural, the almost intra-vaginal warmth of/ hebrew affections."[17]

Davidson here explains how Pound links the aesthetic value of Cavalcanti's canzone to the economic practices of a medieval Italian guild culture unstained by usury. As eponymously suggested in Pound's 1935 pamphlet *Jefferson and/or Mussolini,* expatriate American modernism negated its contemporary cycle of a capitalism marked increasingly by the ascendancy of American empire through ideological fantasies of an ancien régime supported by unalienated labor. For Pound, the European guild tradition is the vanishing mediator without which the free labor ideology of Jeffersonian democracy would be unthinkable.

Consider the recursive transatlantic circulation of this particular modernist fantasy, a fantasy gestated by Pound in America, birthed by the same in Italy, and thoroughly reconceived by Zukofsky, in America once more. By contextualizing Zukofsky's deployment of the canzone form in light of this

specifically transatlantic negation of the origins of American capitalism, we can witness how modernism itself is textured by a global terrain of uneven developments. In deploying the canzone form to elaborate the systematic nature of commodity production—and thereby reject the false redemption of that imaginary space outside of exploitation that Pound seeks to claim for this form—Zukofsky indexes the degree to which the archaic is a politically contested site of mediation. If Zukofsky doesn't find succor in an imagined and unalienated Old Europe, it might be due in part to the fact of his parents' own transnational flight, not to but from a Europe racked with anti-Semitism and late-nineteenth-century financial crises.

""A"—9 may mean more if it be taken also as a sign that capitalism will capitulate."
foreword to *First Half of "A"—9*

The canzone is just one of many structuring forms that Zukofsky uses in *"A"*—9. As he writes in the explanatory notes to the poem, "Guido Cavalcanti's Donna Mi Prega, its music and emotion of intellect; Marx's Capital, extracts from Chapters 1-13 and Value, Price and Profit; some concepts in modern physics; the translations, and the mathematical analogy o the form of the poem; as printed here,— all entered into the writing of the first 75 lines of 'A'—9."[18] The notes include voluminous citations from the primary source materials constellated as raw material for the poem, and also two more vernacular translations of Cavalcanti's "Donna Mi Prega." In addition to Ezra Pound's "A Lady Asks Me" also appended are specifically American vernacular translations, "A Dame Ast Me" by Zukofsky's friend and collaborator Jerry Reisman, written in a racially indeterminate working-class New York boroughs accent, and "A Foin Lass Bodders Me" by Zukofsky himself, rendered in a working-class Irish New York boroughs accent. Our focus in this chapter is less translation than Objectivism's aesthetic treatment of the commodity form, but it is worth abutting Pound's and Zukofsky's translations of the first few lines of Cavalcanti's treatise on love so that the reader might get a sense of their radically divergent attitudes toward the contemporary rehabilitation of Cavalcanti's canzone:

First Pound's:

> Because a lady asks me, I would tell
> Of an affect that comes often and is fell

And is so overweening: Love by name.
E'en its derniers can now hear the truth,
I for the nonce to them that know it call,
Having no hope at all
that man who is base in heart
Can bear his part of wit:
into the light of it,
And save the know't aright from nature's source[19]

Then Zukofsky's:

A foin lass bodders me I gotta tell her
Of a fact surely, so unruly, often'
'r 't comes 'tcan't soften its proud neck's called love mm . . .
Even me brudders dead drunk in dare cellar
Feel it dough poorly 'n yrs. trurly rough'n
His way ain't so tough 'n he can't speak from above mm . . .
'n' wid proper rational understandin'
Shtill standin' up on simple demonstration[20]

This inclusion of these translations in the intertextual fabric that informs *"A"*—9 reveals not just the obvious—that Zukofsky seeks to historicize form rather than use it to transcend the horizons of his present—but also the degree to which Zukofsky's metabolization of Pound's archaicisms transcodes past forms into poetic languages that limn the contours of urban, ethnic, and working-class vernaculars. "A Foin Lass Bodders" sounds at the contact point of the archaic and the modern: our arrival at the door of *"A"*—9's treatment of money, modernity, and labor requires us to pass first through a terrain of class, culture, and the transatlantic impress of colonialism. The discursive life at the very center of capitalist modernity, no longer London, now New York City, is animated by the constant renewal of dialects colonized elsewhere (here, Ireland), in other words, by the reproduction in the emergent core of speech acts connected by living tissues to peripheral expression. In Zukofsky's translation, the working-class subject speaks, affording us a glimpse at a poetics engaged in mapping the speech of labor, and love, that underwrites a world only seemingly fully territorialized by the commodity form.

Significantly, Zukofsky's translation make generous use of the working-class dialect notation *n'* and *'n* as a homophonic supersession of the written

ing and *and*. If the internal and end rhymes of "A Foin Lass Bodders" depend heavily on this condensation, it should come as no surprise that the class-colloquial *n* figures largely in another of *"A"*—9's structuring motifs, which Zukofsky explains following his invocation of Pound on the form of the canzone:

> In addition, the first 70 lines are the poetic analog of a conic section—i.e. the ratio of the accelerations of two sounds (r, n) has been made equal to the ratio of the accelerations of the coordinates (x, y) of a particle moving in a circular path with uniform angular velocity. I.e. values of
>
> $$\frac{\frac{d^2y}{dt^2}}{\frac{d^2x}{dt^2}} = \tan \Theta \text{ where } \Theta = \text{arc tan } \frac{y}{l}$$
>
> are noted for five symmetrically located points. The time unit is the poetry is defined by 7 eleven-syllable lines. Each point is represented by a strophe. Mr. Jerry Reisman is responsible for this part of the "form." The coda is free.[21]

Zukofsky's "conic section" introduces an "accelerating" correction to Pound's somewhat riddled redaction of the canzone form. How does Zukofsky transform the canzone form as Pound understands it? Pound expresses the end rhyme form of the canzone—composed of two sets of four lines, both of which share a rhyme scheme of abcd, and two sets of three lines, both of which share a rhyme scheme of abc—in language interestingly shot through with the discourse of fungible equivalence, that is, the first and the second lobes are "equal" to one another, as are the fourth and fifth.

This rigidity of formal equivalence illustrates the ambient presence of that general equivalent, money, with which all commodities must be made equal. Pound has exceeded the historical demands of the canzone form, as the second equivalence "is not required by the rules as Dante explains them." In doing so, he supplements the formal "rule" of law with a voluntary enthusiasm that recodes the ineluctable symmetries of exchange as a participatory field in which one acts freely, by choice. Zukofsky will redeem Pound's praxis in the service of naturalizing the market for a different project that replaces the agentless determinism of Commodity-Money-Commodity with the willful orchestration of poetic forms. In a demonstration of freedom through unfree form, Zukofsky threads the canzone with sounds filling the abstract space of a conic section. The revolutionary implications of applied mathematics are clear: the revolving accelerations of sounds rerepresent the

repetitive temporal structures of the canzone's rhythms to make visible the invisible interior of the solid cone, much like the poem as a whole renders in lingual relief the labor enshrouded by the commodity form.

Critics such as Barry Ahearn and Peter Quartermain have remarked upon the wildly ambitious nature of titrating together these strenuous poetic and mathematical forms, but as Michael Davidson notes, the "mathematical plotting of "n" and "r" sounds in *"A"*—9 is "irregularly performed and gradually breaks down by the poem's end."[22] In light of this observation, consider Adorno's warning about mathematics as form:

> Mathematization as a method for the immanent objectification of form is chimerical. Its insufficiency can perhaps be clarified by the fact that artists resort to it during historical periods when the traditional self-evidence of forms dissolves and no objective canon is available. At these moments the artist has recourse to mathematics; it unifies the level of subjective reason attained by the artist with the semblance of an objectivity founded on categories such as universality and necessity: this is the semblance because the organization the relation of elements to each other that constitutes form, does not originate in the specific structure and fails when confronted with the particular. For this reason, mathematics favors precisely those traditional forms it denounces as irrational. Rather than embodying the abiding lawfulness of being, its own claim to legitimacy, the mathematical aspect of art despairingly strives to guarantee its possibility in a historical situation in which the objectivity of the conception of form is as requisite as it is inhibited by the level of consciousness.[23]

At first glance Adorno seems to provide an unsettlingly accurate account of Zukofsky's algebra: a canon withered by history without geist requires the poet to introduce compensatory order. Mathematics then offers up a weak universality; a terrible dialectical reversal ensues wherein these mathematics, inorganically applied to the work of art from without, returns us to the very traditions from which the artist sought to break. I want to suggest here, however, that Adorno's warning might help us understand how Zukofsky's "failure" signals an Objectivist's keen awareness of the ways in which the totalities of mathematics are both (1) desirable in that they index a generalized social desire for objectivity and (2) ultimately unrepresentable in a world in which the commodity form has not yet "capitulated." Indeed, *"A"*—9 flourishes in the wake of this demise of "traditional self-evidence of forms," not only because the demise frees up any number of forms for use and experiment but because it points up that forms both archaic (the canzone) and

futural (the velocities envisioned by atomic physicists) are historical and transitory in nature.

Zukofsky's poetic use of mathematics officiates a marriage of space and time, in which "accelerations" of sounds produce space rather than destroy it. This rapprochement of space and time marks the degree to which second-generation modernism forges a poetics that energizes an active reversal of the temporal movements of capital. Here it might be useful to recall from chapter 1 one of Marx's key points from the *Grundrisse* about uneven development: "While capital . . . must strive to tear down every barrier . . . to exchange and conquer the whole earth for its markets, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time."[24] Zukofsky as Objectivist is interested in integrating time and space in a constructivist and nonterritorializing manner, realizing, in a sense, the motion strained for but never realized by the Vorticists. Where Pound resuscitates the canzone from medieval Italian traditions, Zukofsky's historical reach extends even more ambitiously back to the classical episteme of differential calculus—and forward to the accelerations theorized by atomic physics, which he cites extensively in his notes for *"A"*—9. Conjuring spatial bodies out of the dynamism between the hard ("n") and soft ("r") consonants of speech itself, math mediates between the concrecity of immediate sound and the abstractions unfolding into the accelerated futures of our languages. Marx's speculative subjunctive, "if the commodity could speak," lays the basis, then, not only for a materialist inquiry into poetic form but also for a modernism that sounds out the relations between space and historical time.

The closing lines of Zukofsky's foreword to the explanatory notes to *"A"*—9 offer a useful conclusion to these prefatory remarks on the relationship between nation, racialized dialect, aesthetic value, and the commodity form. He writes, "As for the ultimate value of the first half of 'A'—9 aside from what has already been said—a Briton pronounces capitalism with the accent on the second syllable: ca- pit'-al-ism. 'A'—9 may mean more if it be taken also as a sign that capitalism will capitulate."[25] Here Zukofsky reads the lingual prehistory of American heteroglossia in the manner that one reads a poem. That prehistory—for an American a living archaicism—contains within it, if read correctly, an accented morpheme encrypting the abolition of the entire system of profit. The "ultimate value" of *"A"*—9 can only be discovered when its reader sees, and hears, the "signs" revealed in the transnational, and future, histories of language itself. Indeed, if Zukofsky is right, *"A"*—9 is best able to signify, or "be taken as a sign," when its readers refract

it through a historical parallax. The meaning of the poem depends entirely on its operation as a deictic toward an agential future anterior: that time when "capitalism will [have] capitulate[d]." Here then, Objectivist archaicisms entrain the reader to historicize not only the forms of the past but those of the present and future as well. In this way, the auratic especialness of the canzone, or of the conic section for that matter, can only be ratified by the wholesale transformation of the social order. As we turn to *"A"*—9 itself, the reader will judge for herself the success of Zukofsky's project. This wildly ambitious project aims to convoke a subject whose orientation toward the beyond of current temporal and spatial regimes ignites a recognition of the intertwined historicities of the art-object form and the commodity form.

The Choral Lyric: Mimetic/Collective

"A"—9's first canzone opens with themes familiar from the epistolary debates between Pound and Zukofsky: value, use, and exchange:

> An impulse to action sings of a semblance
> Of thing related as equated values,
> The measure all use is time congealed labor
> In which abstraction things keep no resemblance
> To goods created; integrated all hues
> Hide their natural use to one or one's neighbor.

and continues with a chorus of commodities testifying to their origins in alienated labor:

> So that were the things words they could say: Light is
> Like night is like us when we meet our mentors
> Use hardly enters into their exchanges,
> Bought to be sold things, our value arranges;
> We flee people who made us as a right is
> Whose sight is quick to choose us as frequenters,
> But see our centers do not show the changes
> Of human labor our value estranges.[26]

"A"—9's overture does more, however than just redact the finer points of political economy. It also anticipates, and marries, the main—and often counterposed—materialist accounts of modernism: an Adornoan critique of traditional representational logic and a Lukácian protest against the tyranny

of reification. "An impulse to action sings of a semblance" exhorts a revolutionary response to the question of the value of mimesis in a world in which commodity exchange has pathologized all aesthetic practices reliant on equivalences between language and its object. An autonomous "impulse to action" initiates a song meant to expose the (dis)"semblance" of exchange value and to delink lyric form from its traditional enunciation by an individual speaker. Just as word and object can no longer substitute for one another, voice and the autonomous individual are, too, uncoupled.

The regimes of mimesis are inseparable from the principles of exchange value, wherein objects are made equivalent by dint of money, which in turn eclipses a vanishing mediator: labor power. The opening strains of *"A"*—9 adumbrate Adorno's critique of mimetic semblance:

> During the nineteenth century aesthetic semblance was heightened to the point of phantasmagoria. Artworks effaced the trances of their production, probably because the victorious positivist spirit penetrated art to the degree that art aspired to be a fact and was ashamed of whatever revealed its compact immediateness as mediated. . . . Modernism subsequently rebelled against the semblance of a semblance that denies it is such.[27]

"A"—9 meets and exceeds this rebellious negation by positing a determinate historical relationship between the development of the affirmative art form and the commodity form, both of which conjure their auratic nimbi from the obfuscation of their positions in the crosshairs of ideological and material mediations. Critical of the contradictory logic of "semblance," *"A"*—9 points out that threading the skeins between any two entities made equal is an "abstraction in which things keep no resemblance/to goods created."

Throughout the first half of *"A"*—9, the commodities openly—and somewhat perversely—convey their collective melancholia in the familiar tonal registers of modernist antilyric. That is, indeed, part of *"A"*—9's frisson: the unlikely fusion of feelingful affect and deindividuation. The homophonic subsumption of the individual by the collective voice in "The measure all use," which sounds "I'll" and "all" simultaneously, bears the mark of Objectivism's inheritance of an early modernist negation of a lyrical voice aspirated by the possessive individual. Here Objectivism repays this debt, however, by collectivizing its speaking subject. Thus we see the widening net of *"A"*—9's aesthetic and political interventions, which roots the faulty mimetic logic of premodernist forms of representation in the commodity's illogic of equiva-

lence between different objects. In a homologously pathological mimesis, the normative lyric collapses the individuated voice and extra-individual social registers of language. *"A"*—9's exposure of the scandalous collaboration between mimesis and the commodity form renders such a lyric's fantastical representation of interior life impossible.

Note the plural marriage of negations in triplicate: "Light is / Like night is like us when we meet our mentors / Use hardly enters into their exchanges." The simile form ("light is like night is like us") signals the unnaturalness of figurative tropes through a fantastically impossible comparative sequence. Indeed, the commodity form appears in this series only after the simile has been unbound from arbitrary algebras of equivalence, an unbinding effected by the ludic pairing of opposites, where "light is like night." Why choose the simile in particular as the literary object to unravel? Because the simile form is that figuration that most resembles the logic of exchange; metonymy is too totalizing; metaphor too likely to point up difference. The collective lyrical subject—the commodity—choruses fluently, and counterlogically, in the medium of the simile. In doing so, this collective voice furnishes the ground for a materialist revolt against logics that limit the production of value to the realm of exchange and claim expression as the right of the individual alone.

Affect as Effect: Modernist Impersonality on the Crest of Full Commodity Territorialization

Often, in the opening sections of *"A,"* Zukofsky will negotiate the relationship between poetic voice and historical situation by including himself—as a historical (and thusly ethnic, politicized, classed, etc.) subject—among the particulars that he surveys in his poetry. In this way, the contours of affective response shape the ambient surrounds of history itself. When, as noted in this book's Introduction, the speaker of *"A"*—1 exits the opera house performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in an alienated huff to find a workers' demonstration outside, he is the embodied experience of affective encounters that dramatize both fixed and moveable contact points of class, culture, and resistance. Or, in *"A"*—7, when the poet, seated on a stoop, animates wooden sawhorses with "Street Closed" on their stomachs" as they "trot—trot" he concludes "words, words, we are words, horses, manes, / words."[28] Neither pathetic fallacy nor mere symbolic allegory, the objectification of the collective languages of emotions permits their entry into the historical

record. This major renovation of "impersonality" negates the modernist negation of affect as it repositions affect as a part of, not predecessor or response to, the social object world itself.

The first stanza of *"A"*—9 explores this dialectical project of exteriorizing the interior, its collective of commodities gaining their voice through revealing the ways in which their exterior form illuminates their interiors. The next stanza witnesses the "induction" of the commodities' "being":

> Values in series taking on as real
> We affect ready gold a steady token
> Flows in unbroken circuit and induces
> Our being, wearies of us as ideal
> Equals that heady crisis eddy. Broken
> Mentors, unspoken wealth labor produces,
> Now loom as causes disposing our loci,

These fugitive commodities find their origins in the alienated labor of the shop floor:

> The foci of production: things reflected
> As wills subjected; formed in the division
> Of labor, labor takes on our imprecision—
> Bought, induced by gold at no gain, though close eye
> And gross sigh fixed upon gain have effected
> Value erected on labor, prevision
> Of surplus value, disparate decision.[29]

Our first stanza knitted together commodity and simile forms in order to expose the links between representational figuration to the regimes of exchange. The opening line of this stanza, "values in a series taking on as real," intensifies the investigation of the serial nature of general equivalence. Zukofsky invokes the simile form yet again to show the manner in which the "real" is an objective mediation of economic processes that produce value through endless iterations of equivalence. "Gold," that luminous descriptive/noun, is curiously described as the product of the collective commodities' "affect," or its auditory neighbor, "effect." The rule of system by sentiment, or "affect," should come as no surprise; it only crystallizes the stanza's larger proposition that the ideology of "affect" is both material and necessary to the rendering of gold's "value." Just as the "real" emerges as the "effect" of a world created and contoured by the social practice of the commodity fetish,

so does the fetish character of the commodity's "affect" "effect" the circumstances for its own exchange. In a startlingly nondoctrinal account of the material effects of something like emotional life, Zukofsky's Marxism materializes the sentiments that suture fetishistic logics to our interior life. The ever looming crisis of overproduction, when commodities "eddy" and create a dangerous impediment to capital's "flow in unbroken circuit," maps the coordinates of another convergence of sentiment and production, when "value" and/or "gold" "wearies" of the commodity itself. Emotional fatigue accompanies the commodity's constant and unstoppable devaluations as it—by turns—is aged and overproduced. The introduction of affect restores sociality to the only seemingly asocial algebra of commodity exchange and devaluation, and relations between things are revealed as relations between people.

It is precisely at the moment of crisis, when the laborers ("mentors") are broken, that the social act of labor "looms," poised to reveal itself as the "cause," both of the commodity's point of origin and the social revolution ("cause," again) that strives toward the beyond of this origin. It turns out that at the "foci" of production appears an event both social and aesthetic in nature, and the simile once again barracks together seemingly separate phenomenon: "things reflected/As wills subjected: formed in the division/of labor, labor takes on our imprecision—. . ." Here "as" expresses both simultaneity and similarity; the rhythmic togetherness of reflection and subjection establishes once again the imbrication of mimesis and the social relations of exploitation. Mimesis and reification are twinned processes; "things" circulate in the systems of mimetic reflection, while the subjection of the "will" can only be expressed indirectly in the figurative turns of the simile. The simile form offers a circuitous, tropic route into the problem of the representability of exploitation as a structuring logic. The connective hinge "as" insists that subjection and reflection are co-events; "as" also announces a shift from mimesis to poesis, from the logic of reflection to that of tropic figuration. This is the third "as" in a series of four within the stanza; each one cries out—against the fantasy of mimetic immediacy conditioned in part by the objective phantasm of the commodity form—that contact with particulars requires the figurative mediations of language.

In this stanza as a whole and these lines in particular, mimetic reflection leads not to more and more accurate renderings of the social scene but rather toward a representational asymptote of conceptual and linguistic "imprecision." Both reflection and subjection are "formed in the division/Of

labor," born conjointly in the social cleavage that furnishes the conditions for the production process. Organized division colonizes any future implied by the yearning-toward of subjected "wills." That future is presided over by exacting surveillance ("close eye") and risk speculation ("prevision / Of surplus value"). Melancholy subtends the entire process; the "gross sigh," just one letter off from a truly clarifying sight, also affirms the quantifiability of "affect" once again, which apparently is available by the dozens. Following this rendering of something that is starting to look like interiority, Zukofsky turns to the body itself as a new site from which to think at the intersection of production, ideology and the sensate:

> Hands, heart, not value made us, and of any
> Desired perfection the projection solely,
> Lives worked us slowly to delight the senses,
> Of their fire shall you find us, of the many
> Acts of direction not defection—wholly
> Dead labor, lowlier with time's offenses,
> Assumed things of labor powers extorted
> So thwarted we are together impeded—[30]

And the latter lobe of this canzone embroiders a pall for the dead labor encased within the commodity:

> The labor speeded while our worth decreases—
> Naturally surplus value increases
> Being incident to the pace exhorted:
> Unsorted, indrawn, but things that time ceded
> To life exceeded—not change, the mind pieces
> The expanse of labor in us when it ceases.[31]

Against the abstraction of value, we find the commodities professing their origins in the material and figural body of the worker-producer, whose Vulcan flame ("of their fire") shapes commodities epicurean in nature ("lives worked us slowly to delight the senses"). If "perfection" seems an odd way to describe the effects of mass production, its proximity to "acts of direction" should remind us of Zukofsky's 1931 "Program: 'Objectivists,'" which, we recall, defines "An Objective" as, in part, "desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars."[32] Here Zukofsky imports from the "Program" an aesthetic value whose worth is affirmed by its alignment with historical currents into a canzone

that seeks to uncouple alienation from production. Read through the lens of the "Program," the poem finds perfection not in the object itself but in the suppressed desire for labor dealienated.

In contrast to this wish, the products of "hands" and "heart" (hear: "art") find themselves not in the direction of, but rather defeated by, history. Note labor's unfortunate fate at the hands of time: "dead labor, lowlier with time's offenses." Zukofsky refers here to what Marx calls dead labor, a thing resulting from a process usefully redacted by Raya Dunayevskaya, who describes it as an oligarchy of corpses: "The commodity form of the products became a fetish because of the perverse relationship of subject to object—of living labor to dead capital. Relations between men appear as the relation between things because in our alienated society that is all "they really are." Dead capital is the master of living labor."[33] Dead labor, according to Marx, is in a permanent spiral of depreciation, condemned to a constant and irreversible loss of value; it is indeed "lowlier with time's offenses." The increase in the rate of exploitation, or "the pace exhorted," leads to contradictory ends. On the one hand, it increases "surplus value," while on the other hand, it leads to a crisis of overproduction in which the commodities' "worth" is "decreased."

The final lines of this stanza are, of all those in *"A"—9,* perhaps the most densely clotted with homophonic allusions both economic and historical. "Time" here has become a ruling abstraction; it scores the rhythms of depreciation as it quantifies the labor extracted by capital and congealed within the commodity. Time may have the power to "cede" these commodities or "things," but those that it does only wither outside the realm of circulation; they are "but" "unsorted and indrawn," spectral reminders of the worker's now extinguished life "exceeded." These commodities cannot enter into the realm of ex-"change" (the contraction-excision of "To life *ex*ceeded—not *change*," emphasis added); they can never be traded for specie, or "change." This crisis, when exchange no longer occurs, fertilizes the possibility for an enlarged consciousness capable of "piecing" together the now fragmented and illegible labors concealed by the commodity form.

In contrast to the worker who performs "piece" work, doomed to a crushing myopia where part distorts whole, we find a reflective consciousness, or "mind," that reconstructs the labor that instructures the commodity form. When labor "ceases"—as it often did during collective work stoppages in the 1930s—its "ceasing" liberates consciousness from these partial worldviews into far more "expanse"-ive visions. Zukofsky is very precise here about the

relationship between the realms of circulation and production. The crisis in circulation does "not change" the mind but rather provides one necessary condition for a total upset of the political and phenomenological regimes of reification. It is only through "ceasing" work at the site of production that, somewhat paradoxically, the mind can grasp the togetherness of the spheres of labor and circulation that appear separate. "Ceasing"'s political sound shadow, "seizing," looms poetically as the unwritten revolutionary potential of the work stoppage that also happens to end this stanza.

To understand Zukofsky's dialectic of embodiment ("hands, heart, not value made us") and abstraction ("the mind" that "pieces") we can return usefully here to the aforementioned work of Sohn-Rethel. In addition to his account of the historical and philosophical uniqueness of Marx's investigation of the commodity form, Sohn-Rethel makes a larger, attendant argument about the division between intellectual and manual labor wrought by regimes of commodification. In a beguiling polemic, Sohn-Rethel describes how abstraction itself emerges from a process of exchange that demands for its success the annihilation of the commodity's history and use value: "In terms of the exchange abstraction, time becomes unhistorical time and ungeographical space, endless time and limitless space. In terms of this form determination time and space provide the setting for a conception of nature which in antithetic contrast to society. The idea of nature is novel to eras of commodity production.[34] Exchange in*forms* the character of abstractions in general, which come to be defined as such by their remove from social and material reference. Sohn-Rethel explores the wide-ranging effects of the rise of this "exchange abstraction" in the wake of this detachment from social geographies and histories, intellectual abstraction, too, is split asunder from manual labor: "The conceptual mode of thought arose in history as the basis of intellectual labor inherently divided from manual labor. Intellectual labor of this kind has one common and all-pervading mark: the norm of timeless universal logic. This is a characteristic that makes it incompatible with history, social or natural. . . . Of course, this ahistoric mode of thinking is itself a historical phenomenon."[35] The final lines of this canzone deal directly with the effects of the process described so compellingly by Sohn-Rethel. Never positing a utopian reunification of manual labor ("hands/heart") and intellectual labor ("the mind"), the poem instead reveals how the chasm between mental and physical labor might actually be navigated strategically in the interests of nurturing revolutionary consciousness. Only *after* labor "ceases" does the "mind" restore the "expanse of labor" to the

previously "ungeographical space" landscaped by the exchange abstraction. Significantly, this temporal unfolding of totalizing consciousness offers an alternative to the causal metaphysics of idealist thought described by Marx:

> Already in *Hegel* the *Absolute Spirit* of history has its material in the *Mass* and finds its appropriate expression only in *philosophy*. *The* philosopher, however, is only the organ through which the maker of history, the Absolute Spirit, arrives at self-consciousness *retrospectively* after the movement has ended. The participation of the philosopher in history is reduced to this retrospective consciousness, for the real movement is accomplished by the Absolute Spirit *unconsciously*. Hence the philosopher appears on the scene *post festum*.[36]

Marx here notes the tendency of philosophers to reduce consciousness to an epiphenomenal articulation of a transcendental abstraction. Somewhat ironically, the abstracted intellect which appears free from material bonds is really just bound to another abstraction. For Hegel, this is the Absolute Sprit, or, as Sohn-Rethel would have it, the commodity form. Why, it seems proper to ask, would Zukofsky appear to reproduce the division between labor and intellect? I want to argue here that the simultaneous preservation and dissolve of that division furnishes the ground for the unfolding of a holistic, post-cleft consciousness. It does so through maintaining the present-day nonsynchrony of intellectual and manual labor while also pointing up mournfully the division of labor that gave rise to the separation of mind from body in the first place. In the last line, Zukofsky restores the "mind" to the handed, hearted laborer. This "mind" respatializes ("pieces the expanse") and reconcretizes the abstract units of labor contained within the commodity form. The division between labor and the intellect festers in the temporal lag, or "expanse," between "when" labor "ceases" and the commencement of the work of the "mind's" cognitive mapping, and in so doing, provides a sober index of the persistence of abstraction's divorce of body from mind. The syntactical lag significantly also provides the time for this hurt to heal, a militant opening that insists on no ecstatic reunion of mind and body without first the nonnegotiable negation of work stoppage ("ceasing").

Objectivism, the Commodity Form, and the Problem and Promise of Revolutionary Consciousness

I have suggested throughout that we might enhance and renarrativize the stories we tell about the varied tributaries of Anglo-American modernist poetics by merging our histories of literary formations, social movements,

and spatial transformation and variance. In the case of Objectivism, we have charted a provisional constellation of solidaristic aesthetic and political responses to the revolutionary cataclysms of the early twentieth century, and a formal embrace of the uneven geographical, cultural, and political developments that these revolutions by turns responded to and revealed. This spatio-political reconceptualization has many advantages over traditional models of modernist mapping that primarily involve historicist periodizations. Let us suppose, with Jameson in *A Singular Modernity*, that "modernism" is a presently ongoing and chronically unfinished aesthetic-ideological mediation of capitalism's contradictions.[37] If this is the case, and modernism unfurls in constant repetitions, and in countless forms, across increasingly integrated transnational modernization projects, then it is necessary to press beyond historicist models of modernist periodization that barely even began to explain the complexity of their original, intended objects of inquiry: Anglo-American modernism. Scholars of anti-imperialist modernisms have long eschewed arid formal analogies between modernist "fragmentation" and an imagined universalism of similarly sharded collective and individual consciousnesses in favor of accounts of modernisms breathed to life by resistance, revision, and adaptation.[38] This study has thus far explored what happens when such formulations are applied to the modernism of the American interior itself.

Objectivism here is such a test case. We have aligned its works according to their engagements with political economic coordinates: first, the geographies of capitalist development, and second, the territorialization of all social and economic structures by the commodity form and its attendant abstractions. Noting the bad universality of the latter might go some way toward explaining why concrecity and abstraction vie for primacy in the manifestos and poetries of other, contemporaneous modernisms. A somewhat playful illustrative sampling of the tension between object and concept sprung by modernist works might include: W. C. Williams's "no ideas but in things"; Pound's younger adequations of image to ineffable; Wallace Stevens's necessary abstractions; Gertrude Stein's "objects"; Claude McKay's objects of imperialist commerce in, for example, "The Tropics in New York"; Anne Spencer's racial ontology of reification in "White Things"; Richard Wright's urban diorama of oppositional voices that score the collective chant of the future-possible in "We of the Streets"; and T. S. Eliot's objective correlative.

As studies of modernist poetics loose themselves from the analytics of

New Criticism on the one hand and old historicisms on the other, it is nigh to suggest a renewed dialectic between (1) accounts of modernist form, and (2) accounts of modernity as a complicated refraction of capitalist development. The commodity form as analytic offers to cultural critics of modernism and modernity the benefit of a definitive historical arc (inarguably extending its reach ever wider beginning in the late nineteenth century) as well as a particularly beneficial hermeneutic for scholars of poetics: a special attention to the question of, as Marx describes it, "forms of appearance." When placed in relief against the ambient universality of the commodity form, the antinomies of concrecity and abstraction that stretch taut the aesthetic poles of poetic modernism take on ever greater political stakes to reveal deep structure-wide political antagonisms. We've already seen how Pound's and Zukofsky's disagreement about whether or not labor is a concrete thing offers an impress of their political incommensurability. So, too, when we find within modernisms' aesthetic affinities for objects by turns crowned with and stripped of their fetish-nimbus, we are also discovering that the everywhere of the commodity form instructures even aesthetic movements that sought to ignore—or abolish—it.

It is of course the latter which Zukofsky has taken as his project in *"A"*—9. We now return to Zukofsky's canzones, which have lately left us on the precipice of a collective subject's reflective totalization. The next stanza will pluck this subject's desire from the heart of reification itself, beginning first with the abjection of wage slavery:

> Light acts beyond the phase day wills us into
> Call a maturer day, the poor are torn—a
> Pawl to adorn a ratchet—hope dim—eying
> Move cangues, conjoined the coils of things they thin to,[39]

And persist to find a human will toward futurity regretfully invested in the commodities whose very nature it is to recede into the past:

> With allayed furor the obscurer bourne, a
> Stopped hope unworn, a voiced look, mask espying
> That, as things, men want in us yet behoove us,
> Disprove us least as thing of light appearing
> To the will gearing to light's infinite locus:
> Not today but tomorrow is their focus.
> No one really knows us who does not prove us.

> None or times move us but that we wake searing
> The labor veering from guises which cloak us,
> As animate instruments men invoke us.[40]

On a descriptive level, the first line announces the tendency of technology to corroborate exploitation in lengthening the working "day" into the night, through the use of electric lighting and multiple shifts. "Light acts" also inaugurates a new conceit that incorporates textual material from H. Stanley Allen's 1932 *Electrons and Waves: An Introduction to Atomic Physics*, and German physicist Max Planck's eponymous formula for "Planck's constant" as a quantum of *act*ion (emphasis added), both key sources named by Zukofsky in the ancillary materials to *"A"*—9. There, Zukofsky conceptually links a series of scientific discoveries and Marxian concepts, the prior of which will be further elaborated in the ensuing stanzas. Zukofsky describes in the "Restatement" this allusive basis for the above canzone:

> In Applied Mathematics a quantity called "Action" is employed, which is defined as the product of energy and time, and if we consider the action during one complete period of vibration we find it equal to *h*, so that we may regard *h* as an atom of action. . . . Arising out of the work of Planck on the quantum theory an important suggestion was made by Einstein in 1905. This was the hypothesis of the existence of 'light quanta,' according to which the energy of radiation, instead of spreading out from the source in all directions, as the wave theory would indicate, is concentrated or localized in certain bundles or units.[41]

Einstein is a constant point of reference throughout *"A"*; a Jewish paradigm-shifter like Zukofsky, his famous theorizations about the bending of space-time surely appealed to Zukofsky as a cothinker of the "annihilation of space by time." That Zukofsky uses spatial metaphors to redact the interventions of quantum theory as "concentrated" or "localized" should come as no surprise; nor should it surprise us that he notes the date of Einstein's account of light as grouped in "bundles or units." The year 1905 also saw the first of the twentieth century's Russian Revolutions, with general strikes and revolutionary upheavals sweeping Russia's urban arteries and peasant countryside. Discourses and ideas of concentration enjoy prominence in Marx as well as Lenin; both the factory and the urban center concentrated workers and capitalist modernizations together in ways both oppressive and potentially revolutionary.

Concentration not only describes Marx's account of capitalism's geograph-

ical and demographic tendencies, but the process by which labor power is "congealed" or "bundled" in discrete time-units into the commodity, only to be obscured by a fetishism's impenetrable orbital rings. Left modernists like Zukofsky would certainly find intriguing conceptual corollaries in Einstein's theory in which "energy" was not subject to directionless entropy but rather compressed in quantifiable units. In Einstein's account, discrete "quantum" of "action" merge time and energy. For the avant-gardist interested to attend to both the perils and potentials of capitalist development, quantum physics offers a way to conjoin the futuristic and libratory potentials of pure science with present-day attention to "concentrations" both nefarious and incendiary. Lest we think the equations of science and historical triumph belong only to the futurist-fascistic modernist, it is worth acknowledging that for Objectivist Zukofsky, working alongside the literary organs of the Communist Party, the taxonomies and tools of scientist contemporaries offer progressive, proleptic negations of capitalism. Indeed, Zukofsky's embrace of quantum physics as the corollary of Marxian economics seeds a genealogy of modernist and postmodernist formal innovators who embrace the marriage of scientistic formalism and transformative radical politics.[42]

And so the stanza yokes together labor and light in the service of a utopian future perfect. The "day" wills the commodity "into" a "phase." In quantum physics, this is the precise moment when the peaks and troughs of two waves coincide; "into," sounds, of course, "in two" and in doing so emphasizes that the commodities, even when in apparent alignment with their producers, are irretrievably split from their origins. Einstein's "light" suggests a "beyond" of such illusory alignments. Meanwhile, the poor, too, are "torn" by the process of production. Against the imperative of an ever longer day, Zukofsky calls for a "maturer" one. These "poor" are, at present, "pawl to adorn a ratchet"; that is, they continue to force the wheel of industry forward, trapped anew in grooves with each forward tick of the ratchet. The ratchet's circuitous progress depends entirely on this human engine; waged labor is revealed to be baldly coerced and, by dint of history and enjambment, "a/pawling." Zukofsky compares the worker's status as "pawl" to a "cangues," or a heavy wooden torture device that encloses the neck and arms. In his prison, the worker "thins," like the wearer of the cangues who cannot use his hands to eat, while becoming ever more bodily inseparable from the "coils of things." The subtle interior assonance of "join," "oil," and "alloy" are the opposite of wordplay; instead, language, like the industrialist's machines, scores the repetitions of the working day.

The collective "furor" is muted, or "allayed" and in the absence of revolutionary anger and struggle, the "bourne" is made all the "obscurer." "Bourne" is a curious archaicism, referring, in this context, to a figurative limit or destination. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* famously hosts one of the word's earliest appearances in his description of death: "that undiscovered country, from whose bourn/No traveller returns."[43] As rage is "allayed," revolutionary goals—or at the very least the telos of production itself—retreat or are "obscured." Zukofsky's intimate knowledge of Shakespeare, which he first heard performed in Yiddish, permits us to observe that the specter of death haunts this passage; as living labor reifies into congealed dead labor, only the epiphenomena of its actions are visible.[44] Indeed, in his massive treatise on Shakespeare, *Bottom on Shakespeare*, coauthored with his wife, Celia Thaew, Zukofsky makes a special note of a passage from *Pericles*, where "bourne" also nests. He cites Gower's meditation on the craft of the poet:

> Making to take our imagination,
> From bourne to bourne, region to region,
> By you being pardoned we commit no crime,
> To vse one language, in each seuerall clime,
> Where our sceanes seems to lieu,
> I do beseech you
> To learne of mee who stand with gappes
> To teach you[45]

Zukofsky proceeds to gloss: "*with gappes*—the modern poet fretted by his sense of some unmistakable clear end of expression, as compelled instead to be aware of other *languages* where the world is both one and varied."[46] What Zukofsky finds in Gower's speech is this: the will toward a unified "one language," stitched together by the poet who stands in the "gappes" between "bournes" and "regions." This poet's failure is his success, compelling an awareness of linguistic and developmental, variance. Alas, this complex dialectic—or any speech at all, really—is precisely what regimes of capitalist production foreclose, or make "obscurer."

Still "men" project onto the commodity form a diverse triptych of miens. "Stopped hope unworn, a voiced look, mask espying/That, as things, men want in us yet behoove us": these expressions that are as thwarted ("stopped hope") and impossible ("yet") as they are subversive ("mask espying"). Their "hope" is not dim, but rather frozen, "stopped," and rendered inaccessible, consigned to an "unworn" state. Here the commodity's ahistorical congeal-

ments bring together the twinned but opposing developments of immiseration and utopian desire. "Hope" is damned and removed from the repertoire of emotions, while also, through the tragedy of its absence, preserved in a seemingly ahistorical alembic. The commodity provides the screen that makes visible, even as it thwarts, desire for "hope" itself. The same tense logic proceeds throughout the next two phrases. If the commodity form promotes a scopophilic, fetishistic visual register at the cost of spoken expression, then "a voiced look" captures the silences it enforces while also testifying to the quiet presence of an ectopic synesthesia both outlawed and engendered by repression. Even the obfuscations of the commodity form itself contain a lesson for the resistant; from behind a "mask" one can still espy, as if operating clandestinely, a periscope on the very totality from which the commodity is so severed. Despite their utopian character, these projections do little to "prove," or reveal, the commodities' true potentials: as "things of light" that envessel human labor and "will." For these producers, "not today but tomorrow is their focus," and that "tomorrow" has been poached from a possible postcapitalist future, functioning instead as that temporal space to which dreams are deferred and frenzied notions of progress point. Negation in triplicate—"not," (thesis) "no," (antithesis) and "none" (sublation) initiates a classical if dystopian three-part dialectic that begins with foreclosure and ends nowhere. The commodity form repels a transformative arc, substituting instead repetitive and serialized negations.

Critics of the avant-garde have tended to emphasize, and value, its negations, indirections and scathing skepticisms of any and all holistic accounts of history or politics. What are we to make of Zukofsky's refusal of ironic remove here in *"A"*—9? By way of answering, let us begin with a rather noncontroversial proposition: namely that skepticism, in its modern form, is the philosophical and affective comportment cultivated, in part, by the ideological suture of secular enlightenment and capitalist development. The persona of the skeptical modernist is encouraged by, on the one hand, an intellectual and political history of skeptical thought longstanding in its modern form since the Enlightenment and, on the other hand, the specific political-aesthetic mediation of a liberal intellectual culture that sought to imbue modern art with the power to resist all forms of political enthusiasm.[47]

I am proposing, then, that we reread "modernism" as a set of ideological coordinates produced and then conscripted by an institutionalized academic culture allergic to extra-identitarian political fidelity. In this way, we can begin to be responsible to the ideological specificity of materialist modernisms,

like Zukofsky's, which engage with the relationship between consciousness, science, and truth from a historical perspective that looks a good bit like critical realism. Zukofsky's commodities equate political-economic consciousness with the knowledge-work of demonstrable, unequivocal proof: they warn that "no one really knows us who does not prove us." With this knowledge comes a homophonic negation where gerunds lurk subversively and "knowing" suggests "no-ing," or the supersession of the commodity form altogether. *"A"—9*'s negations of the commodity form are truly determinate ones, if measured by Adorno's standard, usefully compressed by Simon Jarvis:

> [Truth] would only be fully accessible if production for its own sake, the fetishization of labor, were to come to an end. The truth-content in works of art, that is, points towards the possibility of a nature which 'is not yet'; but it can only do this by determinate negation of what actually is. Although the truth-content of all authentic art points towards utopia, for Adorno, it can only do so by a configuration of materials which are historical, not timeless, a configuration which each work of art performs in a singular way.[48]

Zukofsky's determinate negations negate the commodity form by critically accounting for the historical profile of its very conditions of possibility. This stands in stark contrast to Pound's account of the commodity, which treats its object of critique abstractly, and without regard for the dialectical relationship between its form of appearance and its situation. The method of determinate negation emerges from the convergence of historical and utopian thought. In its dual investments in the historical past and future of the object, it resists the emptying out of the content of the form into the so many thematic abstractions quickly recognizable to scholars of modernism: technology, mass culture, consumerism, urbanization, feminization, feminism, war, fragmentation, totalitarianism, work, etc. A skeptical liberal tradition has privileged the practice of *in*determinate negation and inscribed this practice as a privileged modality of modernism. The reason for this is, in part, because indeterminate negations turn a blind eye to the origins of their critical object in the contradictions of class and production, and thus cannot help but abstain from heuristics that pursue the possible conditions for the transformation of those same objects.

The concluding lines of this stanza aver that without the partnership of persons ("none") and history ("times") the only transformation possible is one of zombification. Dead labor walks menacingly ("we wake searing")

when the labor is skinned from the body of the commodity ("the labor veering from guises which cloak us") and these bodies are summoned ("invoked") as fetish objects, or bizarrely, "animate instruments." "None or times move us" is a curious construction, sounding "nor" ("none / nor times") and "or" at once. This duality points up that beneath the regrettable resilience of the commodity form to "move"ment or change, lies the indecisive openness of the correlative conjunction ("or"). Here producer ("none") and history ("times") are each bound to the other; if one does not initiate movement, the other, too, is resigned to inaction.

The penultimate stanza of the first half of *"A"*—9 defines the work of determinate negation as the "decoding" of the labor theory of value:

> Dissemble—pledging complexions so guarded—
> Cast of plied error leaves such error asserted
> But stand obverted, men sight us things joined to
> Change itself edging the full light discarded—
> In machines' terror a use there averted—
> Times have subverted the plenty they point to:
> Thing, we have not always known this division—
> Misprision of interest, profit, rent—coded
> Surplus, decoded as labor—evaded
> As gain the source of all wealth so degraded[49]

And diagnoses the consequences of a fracture between producers and a "vision" denied:

> The land and the worker elude the vision—
> A scission of surplus and use corroded
> And still, things goaded by labor, nor faded,
> But like light in which its action was aided.[50]

"Dissemble" calls out recursively to the opening strains of the very first canzone, in which, we recall, "an impulse to action sings of a semblance / of things related as equated values." The "semblance" in the first stanza yoked together the practice of mimesis and the forced symmetries of exchange value, and in doing so, threw into relief that "semblance" itself is an aesthetic index of social and political economies. This "dissemblance," then, only makes explicit what was implicit in the appearance of any mimetic "semblance" performed under the structures of exchange. That is, "dissemblance" announces that we have now apprehended the commodities as

actors of interest in a nontransparent regime of exploitation. Dissemblance enjoys a double assignation here, both to the structural obfuscations of commodity fetishism and to the laborers' "pledges" of proper allegiance to an oppressive structure national in character. From a Shoptawian cryptword perspective, "complexion" is, indeed, complex.[51] It builds upon its root word to link racialization and commodification, both "masked" or "guarded" mediations of social forms of appearance perceived as natural. The "complexions" themselves "pledge" as they "dissemble," their voices detached from interiority, and their patinas of immediacy etched away by legible performativity. Through his description of the carapace of the commodity as a "complexion," Zukofsky establishes an interpenetrative dynamic between (1) the forms of racial appearance, (2) the impossible-to-confirm sincerity of "pledging" citizenship, and (3) a social surface corrugated completely by the commodity form. The imbrication of the commodity form simultaneously with variant instances of social legibility (that is, light or dark complected; fully fledged/pledged citizen, and so on) traces the tendrils of reification into the capillary structures of American culture.

The mummified impenetrability of the commodity form assumes the shape of a "cast" of "plied error." Both "cast" and "ply" extend the poem's incorporation of the machinery of the shop floor, each alluding to the process of fabric production. "Cast" continues the stanza's interest in the dynamic between appearance and labor, as it refers to both exterior surface and the act of casting; an apostrophe also subtends, and we are just one letter away from exhorting the commodity and its makers to "cast o*ff* plied error." The starched wedding of purposeful, even seductive, intention ("plied") with the mishap of "error"—in which the "d" of "plied error" presages the machines' "terror" three lines in waiting—finds subjects working in the service of their own subjection, and in doing so, "leav[ing] such error asserted." Workers "join," or link, the "changes" in the commodity form to those of history itself, a fatal metalepsis that results in the "misprision" that substitutes for structural change the exchange of the commodity.

"Edging the full light discarded" also draws from the textile industry, whose languages Zukofsky surely osmotically imbibed from his father, a presser at a tailor shop. "Edging" refers, of course, to that fabric which renders smooth and seamless awkward edges, covering cuts made by hand and machine. This act of labor seems less productive than decorative, "edging," or offering a prettifying contour, in place of the abandoned "full light" of an expanded consciousness. Even while the industrial scene eliminates all

traces of use value ("a use there averted"), it still gestures towards the potentials it squanders: "times have subverted the plenty they point to." This is a robust dialectical moment, a simultaneous acknowledgment of and requiem for the developmental energies of industrialization.

Zukofsky insists on the "decoding" of "interest, profit and rent" as engridded in the systemic extraction of surplus value from the laborer. Not only paternal occupation inspires the conceit of the textile industry in this passage; fabric itself suggests a thick and threaded web of living and dead labor, worker, and machine. In lieu of such connective stitching, scissors ("scission") split asunder use and surplus value. Zukofsky provocatively rescripts the usual idiom "x eludes me" in which the speaker finds herself in pursuit of a fugitive thought, as if that thought existed outside and prior to the speaker's conception of it. Indeed we find "the land and the worker elude the vision," marking a fundamental bisection of consciousness ("vision") and body ("worker"); of intellectual practice and manual labor. The syntactical reversal, however, also suggests that "the vision" strains toward those who might take it up; in this sense, "vision" is the result of neither inspiration nor individual genius. Rather, it resides and incubates in collective histories, awaiting its realization in each new subject of each new era of production. Under the system of commodity production, "the vision," or a revolutionary consciousness capable of "decoding" the commodity form, has become an abstraction. The agency that such an anticapitalist consciousness once heralded has dialectically soured into its nefarious obverse: an untethered desire incapable of rooting itself in person ("worker") or place ("land").

In this terrain of division—intellectual from manual labor; surplus from use value—the concluding lines of the stanza propose a potentially redemptive reading strategy. That is to say that they suggest a way in which the laboring subject of capital might "still" recognize itself as the very secret of the commodity form itself. Poesis—the aesthetic indirection of figurative language—works the bellows that restore breath to consciousness zombified. Despite the obfuscatory veil that has descended upon the scenes of production and circulation, the "things" do not "fade." They may not be visible directly, but they manifest in and through a syntactically clotted simile: "like light in which its action was aided." Here "it" might refer to the "goad[ed]" labor or to the "light" itself. The doubling performatively enacts the conceptual handfasting of labor and light, which supersedes that old antinomy between concrecity and abstraction. *Pace* Pound, labor power, an abstraction of a material process, is by definition invisible to the eye—even

as its effects plainly structure our landscapes. Similarly, "light" lacks graspability, yet, as Zukofsky insists throughout the canzones, is composed of "quantum" whose materiality is indisputable. The ambiguity of this deictic, "it," works hard to suggest a world in which ambient abstractions rise to the status of the perceivable concrete. The simile form, previously indicted for its corroboration with the logic of exchange, has been acquitted by a counter-fetishistic poetics that rescue labor, "like light" from a destiny in fungibility and abstraction.

For Zukofsky, such poesis aids in the development of a literacy able to decode the commodity form. The simile form in the final line likewise suggests that the convocation of revolutionary consciousness necessarily involves the critical recognition of language as a fundamental and material mediation of the observable world. That is to say, both "things" and "labor" are "like light"; they do not "fade" like the brightness of fabric. Neither, however, are "things" or "labor" directly illuminated. They are visible only after a deep comparative breath; either is "like" light. Where epiphanical visions are undesirably fantastical and individuated, poetic language offers the materialist modernist the opportunity to conceive of transformation of consciousness without recourse to revelatory "unveilings." Significantly, indirection parlays access to the "secret" of the commodity form. Eschewing the immediate transubstantiations of metaphor for the self-reflexive and prolix simile, Zukofsky insists that revolutionary literacy is bound inexorably to the subject's reentry into the symbolic as a conscious participant in its discursive order.

The envoi of this first half of *"A"*—9—and of this chapter's exegesis—continues to posit figurative language as a form of expression privileged by those liberated from the "force" of illusion:

> We are things, say, like a quantum of action
> Defined product of energy and time, now
> In these words which rhyme now how song's exaction
> Forces abstraction to turn from equated
> Values to labor we have approximated.[52]

The commodities end their "song" and disclose their origins at the point of production with another simile, deferred this time by the apostrophic "say." Even the tenor's vehicle, "quantum of action," is itself figural, insofar as it yokes together light and labor by metaphorizing and quantifying the workers' "actions" in the units of Einsteinian physics. The dialectical associate of

this figuratively mediated closing testimony emerges somewhat surprisingly as an immediacy imperatively expressed by the anaphoral "now." The "song" exacts a fee, demanding that "abstraction" of value into exchange ("equated values") "turn" "to labor." Significantly, abstraction is not purged from the scene, but rather realigned to sit at the side not of exchange, but of labor itself, becoming, as it were, an abstraction rescued from bad faith. This is precisely the kind of good abstraction, restored to the labor process, of which Zukofsky couldn't persuade Pound. And this is precisely where Objectivism, as a current within the international revolutionary avant-garde, writes into the beyond of the old metaphysics that would separate the abstract from the concrete, the intellect from the hand.

Conclusion: What Is Objective about Objectivism?

Let us revisit from chapter 1 the first of the triptych of phrases opening "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931" in light of our discussion of Objectivism's treatment of the commodity and its forms: "An Objective: (Optics)—The lens bringing the rays from an object to a focus. (Military use)—That which is aimed at. (Use extended to poetry)—Desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars."[53] Zukofsky's description of the path traveled from the world to its perception—which happens to appear in the very definition of Objectivism itself—is under the textual impress of Marx's well-known analysis of the "fetishism" that attends the era of commodity production. This analysis begins with an account of the relationship between labor and the commodity's form of appearance:

> The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the product of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social.[54]

And invites our special attention with the following comparison,

> In the same way, the impression made by a thing on the optic nerve is perceived not as a subjective excitation of that nerve but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye. In the act of seeing, of course, light is really transmitted from one

> thing, the external object, to another thing, the eye. It is a physical relation between physical things. As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things . . . I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.[55]

I want to argue here that Zukofsky's conception of the "objective" derives from this passage, where Marx explains how the commodity form is neither simply an illusion nor the warping of a false consciousness above which the enlightened analyst can and must rise. The analogy between the process of perception and commodity fetishism is complex, with each in possession of both shared and unique properties. Both perception and fetishism arise out of actually existing conditions: "light [ ] really transmitted" and "the definite social relation between men." They also both involve subjects experiencing the process not as a process per se but as the "objective form of a thing outside the eye." And how do the former differ? Perception is a "physical relation between physical things," while fetishism is the appearance of a metaphysical relation between physical things, when "definite social relation[s]" assume fantastic forms. For Marx, commodity fetishism is the result of "objective" processes, just as for Zukofsky, the direction of history itself is also "objective." Zukofsky's "Program" draws on Marx's reformulation of "objectivity" to describe an aesthetic and an epistemology that ratifies even illusions as emerging from "objective" conditions. Nowhere does the "subjective" lurk as humanist remedy to a world of hostile external data. Instead, the "objective" is that telos in the future ("which is aimed at") where the "subjective" no longer encodes alienation from a surrounding world, and Objectivism, in this modernist fantasy, is the language it speaks.

4 Niedecker

The Interior Voice Commodified

"Six months ahead of a movement and 20 years behind it": Niedecker on Uneven Development

Just prior to Jenny Penberthy's 1996 discovery of Lorine Niedecker's "Next Year Or I Fly My Rounds Tempestuous" in Zukofsky's archive, National Poetry Foundation then director Burton Hatlen found her expanded version of the 1933 poem *Progression* buried in Pound's papers at the Beinecke Library. If critical accounts of Niedecker's surrealist period read it as only a brief stop on a trajectory of poetic development shaped by her correspondence with male poets like Zukofsky and Cid Corman, this is in part because the archive of Niedecker's surrealist work has long been scattered and hidden among the papers of her male contemporaries. Indeed, Niedecker's surrealist period has seemed thinner to readers than her "folk" period because the recuperative work of locating its contents has been made available only in Penberthy's recent edition of the poet's work. And, because Niedecker's correspondence with Zukofsky and Corman appears without the accompanying letters from her male correspondents (the Zukofsky estate has refused publishing rights), the incomplete printed archive only contributes to the myth of Niedecker as a petitioner of Zukofsky's advice; the epistolary record appears one-sided.[1]

The delicate archival status of Niedecker's surrealist work has indeed had a profound effect on its critical reception. Its burial has reinforced the view of Niedecker's surrealist period as a private, personal record that didn't pass muster with much-admired male modernists. New access to these works speaks loudly to the contrary. Ambitious and aggressively experimental, Niedecker's surrealist work reveals formal and substantive resonances with works by female French surrealists such as Claude Cahun's (née Lucy Schwob)

"Beware of Household Objects" and co-Bretonist Marcelle Ferry's "Frenzy, Sweet Little Child, You Sleep."[2] Despite Niedecker's quite likely unfamiliarity with international feminist practitioners working within the surrealist field, her work shares this larger artistic and literary community's preoccupations with experimental form, gender as ludic construction, and the antinomies of capitalist social life. By placing Niedecker's work alongside authors with whom she had no contact but who share her ideological and aesthetic approach, I am suggesting a revision of modernist alignments that is less concerned with psychobiography and epistolary exchanges than it is with global ideological and aesthetic patterns.[3]

This chapter considers work from this early period of Niedecker's oeuvre, including the books *Progression*, *Next Year or I Fly My Rounds Tempestuous*, and the triptychs of *Canvass* and *Beyond What*. Attention to these early works reveals a thick fabric of formal variance and historical content. The poetry from 1933 to 1936, we'll see, deepens our critical account of both Niedecker's and Objectivism's experimental forms.[4] These poems work in multiple tendencies, weaving together the strands of Objectivism and Surrealism, and in doing so, offer flourishing, hybridized materialist and feminist forms.[5]

The poet's commentary on her own work reveals the centrality of her experiments with surrealist forms in her development of an overall aesthetic methodology. Niedecker writes about the curious historical coordinates of *Progression*'s composition in a 1933 letter to Harriet Monroe, then editor of *Poetry* magazine: "Progression . . . was written six months before Mr. Zukofsky referred me to the surrealists for correlation." Niedecker closes the letter with a meditation on her own location within the historical timeline of this avant-garde: "The direction of *Progression* may not be Surrealism, and it may not matter, only that it's a little disconcerting to find oneself six months ahead of a movement and twenty years behind it."[6] Within the context of her own development as a poet, Niedecker's self-reflexive discovery, of finding herself "six months ahead" of a movement before her own familiarity with it, reveals her view of the proleptic, indeed avant-garde, character of her own work. Further, it appears that Niedecker is confessing that her work, with respect to Surrealism as a critically recognizable international movement, would belong to a second generation. More importantly, however, Niedecker's self-representation—as unwitting and ironically belated vanguardist of an experimental practice ordinarily associated with an international coterie of metropolitan artists—upends the gendered reception of

her as a miniaturist and a regionalist. In donning the mantle of modernist self-invention, Niedecker refuses the ideological marriage of folksy populism with the regional countryside. In this sense, Niedecker consciously deploys the term *Surrealism* to very specific and political ends, and in doing so she will body forth a surrealist poetics that is distinct in its articulation and goals.

Niedecker's self-location as ahead of her own belatedness maps an avant-garde poetics that both plays on and is rooted in the asymmetric relations between country and city under capitalism. For here, the aesthetic practices emerging from the rural, that place popularly conceived of as "behind" in time, are uncannily . . . ahead. Niedecker's understanding of her own anticipatory belatedness maps the temporalities of modernist aesthetics onto the landscape of capital's uneven and combined developments: the "folksy" countryside is replaced with a much more historically specific brew of simultaneously modern and residual formations. Contrary to the fantasy that capital revolutionizes the means of production inevitably, uniformly, and ecstatically, capital, as a system, thrives on a mottled geography of varied levels of industrialization within and between nation-states. Capital reproduces the rural, not as its "backward" other, but rather as its endlessly available material for exploitation. Niedecker's comment about her own lateness seizes upon this material relation between country and city and exploits it to elaborate a myth of autochthonous modernist genius. As against the usual association of experimental aesthetics with the metropole, Niedecker relocates avant-gardism to the place of a rural sui generis fantasy.

Niedecker mediates her claims to originality in and through the dynamism that exists between self-conceptions of the rural and the big fact of the capitalist city center, and reveals her sense of her own contradictory position within emergent modernist movements. Interestingly, she refers to the "direction" of *Progression* rather than its contents or formal qualities as the indicator of its place within the poetic movements of modernism. Niedecker views her work as part of multiple tendencies, its place among the historical trajectories of individual modernist movements fluid. Her work defies classificatory systems that conflate clique with movement, or a shared historical moment with a shared aesthetic project. From Niedecker's perspective the avant-garde is a continuous tendency or "direction," located aggressively in both time *and* the spaces of capitalist development; its forms and experiments can and should be taken up and transformed by artists of various historical moments.

Niedecker offers a provocative meditation on the relationship between

this historical-aesthetic belatedness and the poetic promise of interiority, objectified. In a 1953 letter to Zukofsky, she writes: "My own mind is like a star that got to be one through no great effort of its own, just part of world stuff, and the light from it hasn't fallen on me yet. But I feel sumpn—oh, yes, they can't take *that* away from me!"[7] For Niedecker, interior life is "part of world stuff." That doesn't mean that it is fused happily with that world, however; the self is separated from itself by a self-consciousness that doesn't find agency easily, unable to recognize the "great effort of its own." Light-years separate Niedecker from her own mind, but nevertheless she anticipates the arrival of its falling illumination. Similarly, the surrealist feminist finds that she both anticipated and "missed" the movement with which she shares forms and ideas. The splintered geographies of both individual subjectivity and modern cultural movement foreclose identity of self with history. Out of these nonidentities, Niedecker nurtures a remaindered "sumpn," from which she makes her art. This residuum of subjectivity becomes the basis for the exploration of historical and individual possibility, a place from which to begin.

Zukofsky's famous 1931 "Program: 'Objectivists'" and "Sincerity and Objectification," in which, we recall, he summons a materialist poetics that explores our relationship to "historic and contemporary particulars," was an important influence on Niedecker. Her Surrealism takes as its point of departure Zukofsky's claim that language itself is among the material particulars it documents. He writes, of "objectification" that it involves "the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object."[8] Objectification finds the poet shaping out of historical materials an art object with the potential to rearrange and revitalize the contents of consciousness itself. In the most ecstatic versions of Objectivism's practices, the writing object captures and transforms the subject's relation to itself as an object, and a subject, of the world without. Against the mystifications of given narratives, objectified writing seeks to materialize in language—and make the reader newly aware of—the obscured relations of production under capital. The "objects" of these relations, Zukofsky says, not only "affect the mind," but structure mental life more generally.[9] As we will see, Niedecker's surrealist strategies for defamiliarizing reified hypotactical forms share with the Objectivist project a consciousness that the materials used by the poet in the process of objectification are themselves contoured by the historical forces and relations of production.

If Zukofsky's Objectivism, even while imagining the coordinates of a

hatching revolutionary consciousness, leaves somewhat un-parsed the particular qualities of interior life, Niedecker's Surrealism brings Objectivist principles to bear on unevenly interpellated consciousness. The interpenetration of these two avant-gardes in Niedecker's work allows each to supplement the other. For example, the *Canvass* triptych's experimental movements from "subconscious" to "full consciousness" remedy the Objectivist inattention to the subject's psychic internalization of ideological and grammatical expectations. Simultaneously, however, Niedecker's work suggests that the surrealist project of destroying the regulatory arm of the superego must also be accompanied by Objectivism's political work of demonstrating how such regulations are constructed.[10]

To explore the ways in which the uneven topographies of historical development and interior life merge to structure the concerns and forms of Niedecker's surrealist work, we turn to the text of *Progression*. The eight-part poem begins with a constellation of American particulars meant to highlight the contradictory nature of "progress," greased as it is by ideological energies in the service of things as they are. *Progression*'s particulars show how ideological and historical dissonances roil beneath the smooth patina of the historical record:

> Here's good health, friends,
> and soothing syrup for sleeplessness
> and Lincoln said he thought a good deal
> in an abstract way
> about a steam plow;
> secure and transcendental, Emerson avowed
> that money is a spiritual force;
> the Big Shot of Gangland declared he never really believed
> in wanton murder;
> Shelley, Shelley, off on a new romance
> wrote inconsolable Harriet,
> "Are you above the world?
> And to what extent?"
> And it's the Almanac-Maker joyous
> when the prisoner-lad asked the pastor
> "Who is Americus Vespucius?"
> and an artist labored over the middle tone
> that carried the light

into the shadow.
But that was before the library burned.[11]

The passage is alight with rich details from a long twentieth century of American political and social life. Niedecker's fellow WPA worker Edwin Honig remarked upon the poet's research in American history during her work as a writer for the WPA guide to Wisconsin: "We often did research together in the Historical Record Division of the University Library. . . . We shared choice stories plucked from the papers about the antics of Andrew Jackson, the Mexican and Civil Wars. . . . Although Lorine was a Marxist, her strongest sympathies were for human beings, their talk and expressions, and not much for ideological argument."[12] And so Niedecker begins here with a quote from Lincoln, whose "talk and expressions" made their signature mark in the American political landscape. "I have thought a good deal, in an abstract way, about a Steam Plow," writes Lincoln in his 1859 address to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, before expounding upon the possible mechanical impediments to the successful functioning of a steam-powered plow and encouraging further research into the overcoming of these technical problems.[13] Lincoln follows this meditation with a discussion of the various political interpretations of the concept of "free" labor, including the Marxian argument that wage-slavery subtends the ideology of freedom. Lincoln's speech marks an early sense of the changes wrought by the American industrial revolution and described by Marx and Engels eleven years earlier in *The Communist Manifesto*. Their oft-quoted description of rapid and continual historical transformation, "all that is solid melts into air," signals the ways in which developmental exuberance etherizes seemingly permanent fixtures. If the landscapes of the present can be transformed into just another moment in an ethereal history, we find, in kind, that abstract ideas become the material realities of "steam plows" at a rapid pace.

Niedecker summons Emerson as an early thinker of this play between concrecity and abstraction. While he may not have written the phrase "money is a spiritual force," he did praise its beauty and power, writing that "money, which represents the prose of life, and which is hardly spoken of in parlors without an apology, is, in its effects and laws, as beautiful as roses."[14] (Emerson is swiftly paratacted for negative ethical comparison with a preferable mobster who "declares" his disbelief not in god but in "wanton murder.") In proceeding to cite the biting deflations that Shelley directed at his

then estranged lover Harriet, Niedecker throws into relief the ideological alignment of masculinity with the capacity for abstraction and femininity with the "world" of base particulars. The opening salvos of *Progression* carry the message that history and its relations of power and domination continually restructure the relationship between thought and world, and between gender and materiality. Niedecker returns, after Lincoln, to the contradictory status of "free" Americans in her reference to Benjamin Franklin, the "Almanac Maker" and noted convener of discourses of citizenship, freedom, and enterprise. The fourth abolitionist in her series of person particulars (after Lincoln, Emerson, and Shelley), Franklin rejoices at a parodic ur-scene of a "prisoner-lad" asking a "pastor" the etymology of his captor nation's name. This last image works to historicize the violence buttressing the founding myths of the American state, and to implicate its founders, such as Franklin, in the celebration and perpetuation of those myths. Closing with a painterly image of an artist "carrying light into the shadow," Niedecker explores the labor of chiaroscuro. The painter exploits his materials in the interests of illumination and illusion, and beneath each stroke, Niedecker finds the artist's labor. The image of the artist who works between two moments, making visible the invisible transition from light to dark, contrasts strikingly with the male figures of philosophy, poetry, and statecraft whose threading within the narratives of American history is often seamless, bearing no traces of contradiction, tension, or the labor of lies.

The materials from which Niedecker draws this historical survey of ideology, illusion, and material transformation might have been found in Franklin's first public lending library. As her colleague Honig notes, Niedecker herself was heavily dependent upon her local library; its collections mediated her access to the historical record of art, culture and politics. Niedecker's final line points out that this tenuous archive, despite its appearance of solidity and statehood, is as vulnerable as any other material structure. Without this material historical record, history itself comes to an end: "But that was before the library burned." The final line, then, brings together a combustive anarcho-surrealist will to negation with Objectivism's language-centered history of material life. With her access to history parlayed almost entirely by the printed word, Niedecker counts language, and its archive, among the particulars it represents.

The next seven sections of *Progression* pursue this adaptation of Objectivist principles to the surreal nature of the perceptual horizons contoured

by capital and its uneven stippling of national, and personal, interiors. She outlines *Progression*'s compositional methodology in a 1933 letter to Monroe:

> I had explained the poem in this way: 1st section—simple knowing and concern for externals; 2nd section—the turn to one world farther in; 3rd section—the will to disorder, approach to dream . . . the individual talking to himself, the supreme circumstance.
>
> I had sketched my theory thus: Poetry to have greatest reason for existing must be illogical. An idea, a rumination such as more or less constantly roams the mind, meets external object or situation by illogical association. Memory, if made up of objects at all, retains those objects which were at the time of first perception and still are the most strikingly unrecognizable. In my own experience sentences have appeared full-blown in the first moments of waking from sleep. It is a system of thought replacements, the most remote the most significant or irrational; a thousand variations of the basic tension; an attempt at not hard clear images but absorption of these. Intelligibility or reader's recognition of sincerity of force lies in a sense of basic color, sound, rhythm.[15]

Here Niedecker turns the Objectivist attention to particulars, as well as its rejection of myth and transcendence, inward, to examine the material contingencies of subject formation itself. For Niedecker, the individual subject possesses something like an original intentionality, an "idea," akin to a drive, with a singular appetite for "absorbing" a vast world of particulars. "Illogical" poetics offer an aesthetic responsive to the self-consciousness possessed by a subject who does not permit herself a fantasy of control over her world and its "situations" or "objects." Memory, she ventures, always retains a subject's first encounters with the world's materials, despite its ever-thickening phyllo of "thought replacements." For this reason, memory itself can be summoned to do the work of defamiliarizing histories long sedimented and repressed. The subject, like the outer world of data she perceives, is composed of processes and vocabularies specific to its history and social emplacement. "Thought replacements," or the alternating rhythms of displacement and condensation as Freud might have it, score the psychical enactments of each new, remediated layer of contact with the world. The task of the poet is to explore the "progression" of these "thought replacements": to spatialize and temporalize interiority itself.

Of course, Zukofsky, too, investigates the mediations that intervene between the subject and her "objective" world. His response to the structural impossibility of the immediate treatment of the object involves, on the one

hand, a conception of poetic genius able to overcome the resistance of reification (certainly sincerity is never too far off from virtuosity), and on the other, a sober materialism that seeks to explore the mediations that make such agency even possible. By some contrast, Niedecker pursues her "star" and initiates a somewhat more cautious dialectic of agency, beginning with an "illogical" subject whose relationship to the "strikingly unrecognizable" material world is always, initially, one of surprise and alienation. This "illogical" poetic work traces the subject's introjection of "hard clear images." The objective, as it were, is to produce a subject capable of "talking to himself, the supreme circumstance." This self-conscious state is the product of interaction rather than pure introspection; Niedecker inoculates against solipsism with a dialogic examination of interiority as the verso map of particulars and situations. Niedecker materializes this self-consciousness state by way of the Zukofskian "sincerity." Zukofsky explains that "in sincerity, shapes appear concomitants of word combinations, precursors of (if there is continuance) completed sound or structure, melody or form. Writing occurs which is the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody."[16] Zukofsky here describes the materials of language in tropes both visual and musical, and Niedecker shares this descriptive approach when she writes that "the reader's recognition of sincerity and force lies in a sense of basic color, sound, rhythm." Interestingly, Niedecker shifts our attention from the writerly to the readerly process, describing the foundation for the "recognition of sincerity" itself as the cultivation of somatic awareness, rather than intellectual keenness.

The first stanza of *Progression* explores the contradictory ideological profiles of male historical actors both hieratic and hierarchic, an exercise the poet modestly describes in the preceding as "simple knowing and concern for externals." As she writes in her letter to Monroe, Niedecker now turns inward. She charts her dialectic of reflection in the next seven stanzas, whose forms challenge any hard distinction between Zukofskian parataxis and surrealist enjambments. What follows is a kind of game of exquisite corpse, played, impossibly, with the self. Section 2 describes the agitated state of the somnambulist who encounters the world in a half-dream, and discovers that dreaming is not a freedom from, but a negative image of, worldly structures:

> As one Somnambulist to another
> our sleep could be more perfect.

> Surmising planed squares of wood with legs are tables,
> or poppies watched and brooded over finally
> out of bud-shell hatched
> is admitting such superstitions only wait
> to beset us outright.[17]

Here the somnambulists meet with objects whose construction and growth are the result of human labor. This labor, subtending both the "planed squares" of the table and the tended flower, disappears behind a "surmising" that congeals work into objects, and mistakes the germination of the cultivated flower for spontaneous "natural" birth. Our perception, with its attendant "superstitions," does not set us right: rather, it "besets us outright" by mistily refracting our relationship to the history and ontological status of the things in our theatre of vision. The somnambulists' comment that "our sleep could be more perfect" returns us to questions of statecraft. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, which cited the Preamble to the Constitution in its call for a "more perfect union," appears to shape the unconscious of our sleepwalkers. Humorously, the remedy for sleep disrupted, presumably the successful recession into nonconsciousness, finds its source in the founding discourses for the nation state.

Niedecker will show that the perceptions of wakeful life are similarly contoured by ideological demands. Later, in section 4 of *Progression*, she writes:

> Last lines being sentimental, reaction
> is in the first of the cold. The contemporary scene is,
> said the green fog by the charcoal wood, false
> in every particular but no less admirable for that,
> and isn't it humorous to designate at all?[18]

Predating Zukofsky's first half of *"A"*—9, where commodities speak in canzone form to the irreal nature of their appearance, Niedecker here gives voice to the objects populating her rural surroundings, allowing "the green fog by the charcoal wood" to attest to the "false" nature of the "contemporary scene." The fog offers an unwincing assessment of the landscape, while Niedecker's Surrealism finds a kind of ludic pleasure in the "admirable" and "humorous" patina of "designated" "particulars." Indeed, the descriptive deixis, or "designation" of these particulars is less an occasion of mimetic neutrality than it is an opportunity to play or "design." The poem is at once decisively doctrinaire, proclaiming the landscape of the present "false," and

delightfully open to the beguiling, "admirable" nature of even inauthentic "particulars."

The difference between Niedecker's and Zukofsky's positions in this period lies in their respective distinctions between particular and commodity. In this early period, Niedecker's suspicion of any and all particulars runs deeper than Zukofsky's; for her, anything that is not casting its perspective askance on the historical totality of the "contemporary scene" shares with the commodity a ritualized mystification. Such vigilance only sharpens when it trains its critical eye on that other interior: the home. Section IV unfolds in the space of disarticulated domesticity:

> At home, it's blizzard or a curved banana-moon
> on a window sash, soap flakes on wash day
> and door knobs wet; hornets' nests in tobacco pipes.[19]

Here Niedecker regards the changing weather conditions through her window, while inside, the domestic interior has its own different, private rhythm. The "curved banana-moon" isn't just phallic, it is thoroughly scatological in its allusion to the traditional moon shape carved ("curved") into outhouse doors. The blizzard no longer potentiates as a sublime unknowable when it is rendered fungible with ("or") the picturesque kitsch on the bathroom door. Wet hands cover doorknobs with a feminine, laboring signature, while the masculinist particulars of tobacco pipes are clogged by an aggressive, stinging invasion from "hornets' nests." Nature and the domestic are at once impossible antagonists and banally interdependent, and Niedecker explores how gender threads through our experience of the spaces of these oppositions and syntheses, much as it did the contest between abstraction and materiality in the first section.

The rest of section IV pursues forcefully this knotty relationship between gender, labor and concreteness. First invoking Voltaire through a translation of his famous cry against religion, "écrasez l'infâme" ("crush infamy"), Niedecker then describes the "cultivated garden" of Voltaire's *Candide* as a collection of perceptual elements and dreamlike processes. The protomaterialist Voltaire offered human labor as an alternative to mysticism; to supplement, Niedecker offers Surrealism as an alternative to "white dome logic":

> . . . I remember a garden:
> exigential, or violet, I've forgotten, but delphinium

with suspect of turquoise, formuloses deterred
at the start from interval form by trick of eye
or soul or sun and since by whom . . . you
swinging your cape too far to the left, the effect
is blue, not periwinkle; you triumphant over cauliflower
polonaise; you full of principles; and you crying
crush infamy when you should be shaking hands
with the Cardinal. The most public-cant-and-cabbage
interruption comes, however, from circles where
the farm question is discussed, —a white dome logic
no wayside strabismic house, rafters owling out
the night would recognize; no talk there, none,
of why there's nothing like a good warm cow
when the wind's in the west.[20]

Memory and materiality converge in this lush garden. The data that structures this memory is made strange, or "strikingly unrecognizable," as Niedecker explores the "interval forms" that constitute the temporality of perceptual "absorption." Fragmented correlative conjunctions such as "or," "but," and "not" enact the psychical process of "thought replacements" that Niedecker describes to Monroe in her account of phenomenological life, and reproduce the hesitations ("deterred at the start") and vacillations ("with suspect"; "trick of eye") that precede solid, accrued images. Her poetry dwells in the prehistory of the unified subject, estranging us from a world with which we only appear to be integrated. Niedecker, like Voltaire, wants to "écrasez l'infâme" of mystified appearances, whose cunning suggests that she should, by contrast to this materialist hortative, "be shaking hands with the Cardinal"), and she does so by exploring the hegemonic foundations that compel subject formation tout court. To these ends, she turns again to the discourses of American governmentality. The legislature debates "the farm question" in Capitol Hill's "white dome of logic," and in doing so, reveals the imbrications of the power of authority and narratives of de jure doctrine.

This dome contrasts with its preferable alternative: a "wayside strabismic house." Niedecker aims to show how the abstract empiricism of those engaged in discussion of the "farm question" contrasts with the direct appreciation of a "good warm cow." "Strabismic" and "wayside" echo Zukofsky in "An Objective." Zukofsky, describing how the indirection of the Objectivist

"aim" is intentional, rather than a defect in approach, remarks: "Strabismus may be a topic of interest between two strabismics; those who see straight look away."[21] Where Zukofsky would valence the parallax of strabismus as unclear and aimless, Niedecker finds the "wayside strabismic house" refreshingly rambling, owls in its rafters and one with the night. In this peripheral, unbound counter-dome, simile and figurative turns are unnecessary supplements ("there's nothing like") to the pleasure of nature and the modest surplus of a "good warm cow."

Before the final lines can endorse of this kind of countrified simplicity, the surrealist must delve inward to prepare the way for such a reconciliation with peripheral ethics. In her "turn to one world farther in," "hard clear images" give way to the neologisms and parodies of Latinate forms ("exigentials"; "formulosos"). For Niedecker, the inward turn is an extension and complexification of, rather than a retreat from, Objectivist materiality. Its richness, however, exceeds available vocabularies and the will to mimesis is overmastered by linguistic forms of adventure and approximation. A descent necessarily aided by the poet's purposive purposelessness, Niedecker attains to a self-consciousness that shuns the antinomies of a materialism concerned only with either empirical givens or immediate concreteness. If we find her holding the line of solidarity with peripheral mores at the end of the passage, it shouldn't surprise; most commitments and solidarities are preceded by peaceful, if hard-won, negotiations with a wild interior.

By section VII of her *Progression*, Niedecker's marriage of contemplative self-reflection and agential possibility bears fruit, accompanied by an even more radical suspicion of interior legibility. The world of "sound and rhythm" structures this "approach to dream":

> I must have been washed in listenably across the landscape
> to merge with bitterns unheard but pumping, and saw
> and hammer a hill away; sounds, then whatsound, then
> by church bell or locomotive volubility, what, so unto
> the one constriction: what am I and why not. That
> was my start in life, and to this day I touch things
> with a fear they'll break.[22]

In an ecstatic interpenetration, sight and sound have become porous to one another. The speaker "merges" with "bitterns unheard but pumping," and even the booming sound of herons is only inferred by movements in the visual register. Later, the reverse is true; the church bell announces the

presence of the unseen hammer and church. The senses suture a landscape of uneven development, where nature abuts industry ("saw and hammer a hill away") and churches need the language of trains to be heard ("church bell or locomotive volubility"). Our speaker is an ear "across the landscape" and it is through her own positioning in the crosshairs of developments that she drafts drawings of a boundary ("one constriction") that defines her ("what am I") amid her surroundings. "What am I and why not" lacks the punctuation of a question—because it is less of an interrogative than a proposition that finds the poet enjoying the promises of a newly materialized, spatialized "I." Like "whatsound," the "I" *is* a "what" that is included in, and not above, the world of particulars. Consciousness of this fact opens onto a word beyond negations, where "why not" describes a state of persistence, rather than a provocation. A subject who is part of the world may act on it as well; this realization brings apprehension along with possibility. Less solid than sound, the breakable "things" attest to the fear and otherness occasioned by not yet habituated childhood experiences ("that was my start in life" or the "time of first perception") with which one mixes in the journey inward. In its adult form, this "fear" dialectically energizes a boldness: "things" are as mercurial as the landscape, and the carapace of commodities is no match for the "touch" of a subject aware of her historical and geographical coordinates.

The final stanza of *Progression* explores language generated by what Niedecker calls in her letter to Monroe "the will to disorder." Neologisms, incomplete sentences, truncated words, unintegrated punctuation and other "unintelligible" forms highlight the agency of a "sincere," self-reflective subject:

> Close the door and come to the crack quickly.
> To jesticulate in the rainacular or novembrood
> in the sunconscious . . . as though there were fs
> and no ings, freighter of geese without wings.
> I know an ill for closing in, a detriment to tie-ups.
> They pop practical in a greyfold, bibbler and dub—
> one atmosnoric pressure for the thick of us.
> Hurry, godunk, we have an effort to wilt.
> I shall put everything away, some day,
> get me a murmurous contention, and rest.[23]

Demanding the door shut to the outside, Niedecker speaks to us through a crack, furtively proposing other comportments ("as though") and freedoms

beyond the domestic. Cracking jokes, she considers various and comedic attitudes: "jesticulation" conjoins verbal play and bodily disport within a vernacular language, naturalized, or, made "rainacular." Brooding in the (s)unconscious is also done out of doors, where boundaries between interior and exterior are blurred in the light. Subtractive phonemes present us with the playful possibilities of new languages—"as though there were fs and no ings"—but cost the geese their w"ings." The image of a freighter of wingless geese is at once mischievous and solemn, designed to highlight how altering the material forms of language has the power to transform not only the signifier but the signified, too.

Language couldn't be more alive, as the sound units of "pop practical," "bibbler," and "dub" insist on movement within the text by enacting a series of typographical reversals: "pop practical" 's alliterative "p"s stand upright to become the similarly doubled "b" 's of "bibbler," which in turn shed one to reverse into the "d" of "dub," before returning to itself, now as an opposing final, eastward-bound "b." All of this serious play vaccinates against "an ill": the "tie- ups," or repetition compulsions, that stall forward motion when "closing in" the "greyfold," or gray matter of interiority. Surrealist forms, despite their appearance of hapless nonintentionality, furnish a space for agency, and resist the solipsism and psychic bondage that can accompany even the best-charted journeys within.

As our traveler builds new theaters of perception, she requires a language adequate to a changed inner landscape. "We" appears for the first time in the entire poem, suggesting that, like the translucent membrane that limns the borders of inner and outer life, distinctions between self and other have become blurred. The future holds the possibility for "rest" and the transformation of murderous intention into gentler ("murmurous") but no less assertive ("contention") comportment. This quieter time is still remote, however. For the present, the "will to disorder" registers an Objectivist attention to the constructedness of the word-image, as well as a surrealist intent to negate everything, including the imagined cohesion of the subject herself.

Progression does indeed "progress," loosely following Niedecker's own description of its development from a "concern for externals" to an "approach to dream." In contrast to narratives of progress that offer up only inevitable, agentless historical movement, Niedecker uses the term to denote the intensification of the subject's intervention in her interior and exterior habitat. Between the abstraction and concrecity whose opposition we explored above, Niedecker charts the middle ground of mediation, what

she calls the "absorption" of perceptual data by the individual subject. This process of introjection insists on the interdependence and mutual materiality of thought and world. Niedecker progresses inward to explore the perceptual and ideological roots that precede the subject's misprision of itself as integrated into a hostile world of commodities and gender comportments. In these ways and others, *Progression* invites us to rethink the gendered alignment of interiority with retreat, and exteriority with advance. Instead, the work shows how the charting of interiority is (1) quickened in a subject alive to her exteriors, and (2) an integral part of the reentry of such a subject into the histories that prepared her in the first place for inward reflection.

"Experiments in verticality": Niedecker Scales the Interior

"Utter mystification" was how editor Monroe described her response to the poetic experiments in planes of consciousness that Niedecker submitted for possible publication in *Poetry* magazine in 1934.[24] While Monroe's response was intended as a terse rejection, it was in fact an accurate description of what Niedecker was trying to accomplish. In both the movement from "subconscious" to "full consciousness" in the "Canvass" triptych and the movement from "subconscious" to the "social-banal" in the "Beyond what" series, Niedecker indeed charts the "utter mystifications" of everyday life. These mystifications, it turns out, are so naturalized that they even structure the state Niedecker describes as "full consciousness."

Niedecker writes to Monroe on the form of "Canvass" (spelled "Canvas" in this letter):

> An experiment in three planes: left row is deep subconscious, middle row beginning monologue, and right row surface consciousness, social-banal; experiment in vertical simultaneity (symphonic rather than traditional melodic form), and the whole written with the idea of readers finding sequence for themselves, finding their own meaning whatever that may be, spectators before an abstract painting. Left vertical row honest recording of constrictions appearing before falling off to sleep at night. I should like a poem to be seen as well as read. Colors and textures of words appearing simultaneously with the sound of words and printed directly above or below each other, All this means break-up of sentence which I deplore though I try to retain the great conceit of capitals and periods, of something to say. It means that for me at least, certain words of a sentence,—prepositions, connectives, pronouns—belong up toward full consciousness, while strange and

> unused words appear only in subconscious. (It also means that for me at least this procedure is directly opposite to that of a consistent and prolonged dream—in dream the simple and familiar words like prepositions, connectives, etc. . . . are not absent, in fact noticeably present to show illogical absurdity, discontinuity, parody of sanity.)[25]

Niedecker's experiment in "vertical simultaneity" continues her interest in representing the essential units of perception, including "colors and textures." Her emphasis on the simultaneity of presentation, in which the reader is meant to encounter a visual map of states of consciousness, rather than to be strung along by a narrative "melody," affirms the fluid relationship that exists between these nondiscrete states of consciousness. Significantly, Niedecker makes the distinction between her poetic forms and the forms of dream life. In dreams she finds an intensification of narrative structure, rather than a freedom from it. The "subconscious" state for Niedecker is one that maintains the dialectic of intention and receptivity; it is a purposeful tension that reveals the "constrictions" (rather than liberation) imposed by sleep. Thus, Niedecker is concerned to point out the difference between her highly agential method and that of something like automatic writing, as well as her suspicion of any psychical state, including that of dream life, which may merely appear free from codes, commodities and conventions. Importantly, however, for Niedecker the agential method is emphatically situated in material structures. Her "agent" is not an autonomous one but rather one that rejects myths of transcendence in order to examine the material contingencies of subject formation itself.

In the "subconscious" poem "Canvass," the first of the triptych, Niedecker eschews the orders of traditional syntax, which would foreclose the possibility of nonlinear associative forms:

Canvass[1]

Unrefractory petalbent
prognosticate
halfvent purloined
adark
vicissitudes of one-tenth
steel-tin
bluent, specifically unjust
cream redbronze
attempt salmon egress

masked eggs
ovoid
anodyne lament
metal bluegreen
drying
smoke dent
exceptional retard
bald out
affidavit
flat grey shoulder.
carrion eats its call, waste it.
He: she knows how
for a testament to Sundays.

1. subconscious[26]

Niedecker draws on visual registers to create a poetic terrain replete with painterly shapes and colors expressed through hybrid words and neologisms, rather than through linking parts of speech and punctuation. The rhyming neologisms "petalbent," "bluent," "smoke dent," signal the potential for new forms to emerge while in this subconscious state. Indeed, the title itself, "Canvass," merges its explicit meaning—examine in detail—with the homophone of a painter's work surface. This layering of visual, auditory, and literary forms characterizes the complex, paratactically present landscape generated by the subject turning on itself to "canvass" self-reflection.

The adjacency of organic particulars ("salmon," "eggs") and inorganic particulars ("anodyne," "metal") indicates that for Niedecker the subconscious is not a pre-social space of unmediated organic plenitude but rather a terrain in which modernity's contradictions and uneven developments remain unresolved, and in continuous conflict. Niedecker disrupts the reduction of the salmon to an ideological symbol of primordial reproduction by alluding to the mediated nature of our understandings of its biological reproductive processes. Its reproductive originals, its "eggs," are "masked." Further, they are "ovoid"—the word simultaneously describes their external shape and suggests an internal "void," an emptiness and/or emptying. Such presentations of the organic as always-already constituted by mediating terms and expectations disrupt the commonplace perspective of biological reproduction as a fully natural process. The "masked eggs/ovoid" thus do not prom-

ise fecundity but rather threaten emptiness. Similarly, "ovoid," containing two egg-like *o*'s, highlights the materiality of the word itself, as object. Citing the object of description within the word itself, "ovoid" disrupts the link between symbol and an original, organic referent, and reads against the sedimented layers of symbolic narratives that we bring to concepts of nature, reproduction, and birth. Modernization's objects and materials—"steel-tin" and "metal"—bookend the image of the salmon and its eggs. In the nonnarrative space of the subconscious, the material, historically specific particulars of the present repeatedly intervene in the imagined/projected primordial of the symbol, revealing the historical contours of "subconscious" assumptions and perceptions.

The next poem in the triptych, "For exhibition," charts the influence of narrative and grammatical conventions on the structures of the "wakeful," a state Niedecker locates between "subconsciousness" and "full consciousness":

For exhibition[2]

for round
of or
in the young beautiful of life
hat laid away, done for . .
help a doorlight undergo
monotones
faily
refervid
emotionally
or coral on black velvet
gumdrops and proletarian fiction . .
fast whaler
formaldehyde
backline reversed
no ageratum
mine might blast the nose
impectinal . .
a
jellying
If you
Denmark

whisper
I can't quite notify
an extreme time.

2. wakeful[27]

Throughout "For exhibition," Niedecker employs conjunctions and prepositions in order to highlight and disturb the narrativizing tendencies of "surface-conscious" expression. In the progression of this poem, we get a glimpse of wakefulness in tension with the hypotactical pull of consciousness proper. For example, the opening lines, "for round/of or," bring together prepositional and conjunctive terms that defer easy reference, forestalling mystifying clichés in communication. Similarly, Niedecker reorders clichés into "the young beautiful of life," disrupting routinized, conversational forms. Most importantly, perhaps, the conventional subjects of the poem's interpersonal address, "you" and "I," emerge only in the final lines of the poem, as if themselves produced by the narrativizing turn of the "wakeful" consciousness itself: "If you/Denmark/ whisper/ I can't quite notify/ an extreme time." Bound together by a truncated if/then clause, the egoic self and its other (introduced as "you") emerge interdependently, their fates linked by an implied, hypothetical narrative. Yet the hypothetical narrative relation is also conditional: "if" the addressee (the "you" whose possible name and possible location both can be marked by "Denmark") should "whisper," the (implied) consequence is that "I can't quite notify." These two interdependent subjects, brought into being by the "wakeful" narrative turn itself, are thus simultaneously linked to and estranged from one another. Significantly, the elision of the adverb, "then," presents the self's statement—"I can't quite notify"—as a declaration linked to both the preceding lines ("If you/Denmark/ whisper," read as a conditional of the if/then clause) and the poem's concluding line ("an extreme time," read as implied grammatical object of the self's declaration, "I can't quite notify"). Thus, in this "wakeful," transitional state, the self (the "I") "can't quite notify" the individual addressee ("you," "Denmark") or the self's own relation to "an extreme time" of her address. This ambiguity of grammatical reference for the self's point of address highlights the necessarily conditional, necessarily unstable narrative of the self's "wakeful" recognition, of other, of self, and of the temporality of her very address. Not yet seamlessly integrated into either an interpersonal or an historical context, the individual speaker remains at the edge of social interaction.

But if we consider "For Exhibition" in its "symphonic" relation to "Canvass," we find that this edge is not simply the abstract psychic space of some sociality unbound. The speaker keeps missing her addressee in these final lines: the interlocutors are separated by auditory gaps (Denmark "whisper"s) as well as temporal ones ("extreme time," the general "if"-ness of the whisper, and the "can't quite" of the response). The temporal unevenness of Niedecker's "wakeful" poem thus reiterates the spatial unevenness of "Canvass," returning us to the question of the subject's determination by her material landscape. Finally, this landscape of temporal asymmetries convokes a specifically modernist historical consciousness of both break and seriality.[28] Niedecker's "an extreme time" is also, homophonically, a next ("an ext") time. The temporal ruptures of the modernist historical consciousness are thusly conditioned by the temporal ruptures of uneven development.

In the final, "full consciousness" poem of the series, "Tea," the poet introduces more syntactical connective tissue.

Tea[3]

dilemma
my suit, continuous
dear hind button off . .
the velocities with which different
    fluents change
Newton's
        compose in the mass
wander
        anent
            anyone
(negress certainly not)
                    sidewheeler
                painted:
on the next moon
            be still: we are near life
focus your face to a
then oh, divers lanterns in
I meet
        sworn
            thick
                think

shuffles o loud foot.
to come to the end and pass it
but I am having

3. full consciousness[29]

Traditional sentence structures, alongside the self-consciously correct grammar of "with which" in line 4, announce that the poet has entered the realm of social and semantic expectations. "Canvass" begins the exploration with simultaneously occurring adjacent particulars of development. "For Exhibition," with its prepositions and "if" clauses, suggests more formal, if incomplete, relations between people and things. "For Exhibition" ends with a newly born and uncertain "I." The first lines of "Tea," however, reveal an already social, "suited" self: the possessive individual subject ("my suit"). This social self of "full consciousness," however, is also introduced in the midst of a "dilemma": contradictions that once remained adjacent and simultaneous become choices required of a socialized subject who must organize herself according to the hypotactical demands of full consciousness. And while "For exhibition" ends with the "wakeful" self's uncertain (mis) recognition of "an extreme time," "Tea" presents the self of "full consciousness" disoriented and unbuttoned by the social space and time of Newton's transformative laws of motion, its "velocities" birthed alongside the sciences of early Western modernity.

The parenthetical "negress certainly not" divides "Tea" in half. Niedecker transforms the "salmon egress" of "Canvass" into a racialized, inassimilable force of negation, the "negress certainly not." In doing so, Niedecker elaborates how the socially regulated field of full consciousness is structured by a struggle on the part of resistant social subjects against the routinized laws of language and of social structures that seek to contain them (here in parentheticals). Furthermore, negation and freedom converge in the recursive morpheme "egress," and the seemingly primordial force of migration is granted historical contours. The false universal of "anyone" is qualified by "negress, certainly not," and the poem thus replaces myths of the seasonal circadian rhythms of salmon migration with racist geographies of unfreedom and exclusion. If "egress" introduced the triptych to the terms of uneven development, "negress" concludes it by replacing the fantasy of unfettered freedom of movement—and indeed, the fantasy of a universal subject—with a landscape of development structured unevenly by concrete social exceptions to universal freedom.

After the emphatic double negation of "negress certainly not," the poet moves beyond the limits defined by narratives that must have beginnings and ends. The closing lines "to come to the end and pass it/but I am having," concludes the poem's three movements. Niedecker begins with the chronicle of an itinerant subject amid a modern world of contradictory particulars. With the final announcement, "but I am having," the poet counts herself among the exceptions to the rules of grammar and narrative structure. The final sentence is shorn of its object, and the poet reveals the link between our grammatical expectations and our social expectations. Refusing to complete the sentence, Niedecker frustrates the reader's ability to "end" the poem; she thus also challenges our notion of a subject that is defined by what it consumes, possesses, or "has."

Niedecker's second "experiment in verticality" explicitly elaborates, through its thematic contents, the politics of form introduced in her first series.[30] In the "subconscious" "Beyond what," Niedecker explores the psychic landscape of war.

Beyond what[1]

decapitated areas
momently to the constant removal
liquidating aftermath
inspired marksmanship
Devil the ash trays show it
instant with glee
black winged lazuli
beets redden and revert

1. subconscious[31]

Traumatized place and person merge in the "decapitated areas" of a fantasy life saturated with history. The spectral presence of official platitudes—"inspired marksmanship"—haunts the mental scene. In the poet's presentation of the "subconscious," the language of war propaganda remains unintegrated, and thus its ideological content is thrown into relief. The "black winged lazuli," linked by end rhyme to the preceding "instant with glee"—an instant of recognition, perhaps, in which the "ash" of history throws up, like tealeaves, a premonition of the future—suggests the condensed surrealist image of speeding bullet/bomb/plane/precious gemstone as omen-bird. Similarly, the treasures of the earth ("lazuli") are "black winged" like omen

birds or fighter jets, and the roots of the earth "redden and revert," bomb-like, in the abandoned landscapes of nature.

As in the "Canvass" series, the second poem brings with it the emergence of the individual ego in its straining "toward monologue" and structures of meaning bound by narrative grammar.

I heard[2]

too far for me to see
lest we forget
no fan thank you
peonies
if only one could
I was born on a farm
I watched arrive in spring
city your faith in arches

2. toward monologue[32]

The past tense of the title "I heard" links monologue with the narrative reproduction of sensory perceptions, received images, and ideological languages whose sources are external and prior to the self. The ego emerges in the context of multiple negotiations with this external world. The line "too far for me to see" announces the inadequacy felt by a subject in relation to a world whose totality exceeds its perspective. Potentials both threatening and unrealized define her horizon of possibility, as she warns "lest we forget" and muses sadly "if only one could." Significantly, the self imagined by Niedecker is born of negativity. She rejects the decorations of femininity ("no fan thank you") with an oppositional subjectivity rooted in the rural. "I was born on a farm," the most traditional of autobiographical statements, instead of fulfilling the autobiographical function of individuation, merges Niedecker the individual with rural conditions outside the space of the city, and of its "faith in arches."

The final poem of this second series, "Memorial Day," elaborately parodies hypotactical structures and traditional grammars by linking these forms with nationalist myths and the language of war propaganda.

Memorial Day[3]

Thou hast
not foreign aggression

but world disillusionment
dedicated to the proposition
of an ice cream cone
and the stars and stripes forever
over the factories and hills of our country
for the soldier dead

3. social-banal[33]

In this "social-banal" terrain, the poet explores nationalist imagery of "stars and stripes;" "ice cream cones," "our country," and "the soldier dead." As with "Tea," the final poem of the previous triptych, "Memorial Day" stresses normative narrative forms in order to highlight their political stakes, creating a hyperbolic, almost ludic hypotaxis. The oppositional rural landscape that defined the individual subject in "I heard" becomes the populist-inflected "factories and hills" that furnish the conditions of possibility for a collective, national subject. This new subject lives an existence circumscribed by the ideological structures and demands of national life and national priorities. The warnings "lest we forget" of "I heard" go unheeded; and the psychic and material traumas of "Beyond what" are foreclosed by an ideological constellation of consumption ("ice cream") and nationalist clichés ("stars and stripes forever"). "Memorial Day" ironically involves distancing oneself from the immediacy of historical trauma, through the reproduction of memories fully mediated by the ideological demands of the state. This state, like its "social-banal" subject(s), lacks the quality of self-reflection, a human property, which for Niedecker is linked to the capacity to confront historical particulars directly. By intensifying her explorations of the "subconscious" with an Objectivist desire to explore, toward political ends, a materialist poetics of historical and contemporary particulars, Niedecker averts the potential solipsism involved in the surrealists' introspection.

Through these "experiments in verticality," Niedecker revises both Objectivist and surrealist practices, developing a theory not only of artistic production but also of artistic reception. Her desire that "readers find sequence for themselves" extends her political work to the realm beyond the page, into the experiences of her readers. As she wrote in the letter to Monroe: "The whole thing [was] written with the idea of readers . . . finding their own meaning wherever that may be, as spectators before abstract painting." Niedecker's experiments in agency and reception thus also concern themselves with the readerly comportment. Niedecker brings the

surrealist and objectivist critique of purely expressive aesthetics to its radical conclusion—indeed, she says in another 1934 letter to Monroe that her goal is "to discredit all journal method everywhere."[34] Niedecker demands, in the last instance, that, as the hieratic poet vacates the poem, the labor of interpretation that the reader brings reflect, ultimately, her own position in a world of objects.

Between Freedom and Unfreedom

In "Looking Back on Surrealism," Adorno describes the conditions of possibility for the surrealist dialectic:

> It seems paradoxical for something modern, already under the spell of the sameness of mass production, to have any history at all. This paradox estranges it, and in "Children's Pictures for the Modern Age" it becomes an expression of a subjectivity that has become estranged from itself as well as from the world. The tension in Surrealism that is discharged in shock is that between schizophrenia and reification, hence it is specifically not a tension of psychological inspiration. In the face of total reification, which throws it back upon itself and its protest, a subject that has become absolute, that has full control of itself, and is free of all consideration of the empirical world, reveals itself to be inanimate, something virtually dead. The dialectical images of Surrealism are images of a dialectic of subjective freedom in a situation of objective unfreedom.[35]

Niedecker's surrealist work negotiates precisely these antinomies. The formal tension it maintains between strategies of free association, which looks something like automatic writing, of constructedness, and of reportage, produces a vertiginous alternation of subjective agency and objective determinations, in and against things as they are. Indeed, the work we have been surveying strives toward a sublation of the terrified self-consciousness that Adorno describes. Niedecker concretizes Adorno's dialectic by alighting from, and throwing up, geographies of interior, and worldly, unevennesses to break the "spell" that we live in a universally homogenous "sameness of mass production." In this way, the subject's "unfreedom" is not metaphysical but rather produced by the interstitial hollows it must inhabit to do its work of defamiliarization.

Let us return to Niedecker's anticipatory-belated methodology, described, if we recall, to Monroe as "a system of thought replacements, the most remote the most significant or irrational; a thousand variations of the basic

tension; an attempt at not hard clear images but absorption of these."[36] Niedecker's intensification of subjective freedom strains toward the "supreme circumstance" of the "individual talking to himself," and in doing so, produces the recognition that seemingly "subjective" psychical processes are themselves "objective" in the Objectivist sense of the term: interior life is revealed to be "a system of thought replacements," or a map of ideological-perceptual mediations. While the objectification of mental life does not, of course, change the situation of "objective unfreedom," the technique *does* claim the processes of "depersonalization" for the avant-garde project of creating a subject capable of recognizing itself as both object and agent within its contradictory world.

Against the reductive psychologizing view of Surrealism as a movement depicting the world of dreams, Adorno writes: "that is not the way people dream; no one dreams that way."[37] "The subject," Adorno continues, "which is at work much more openly and uninhibitedly in Surrealism than in the dream, directs its energy toward its own self-annihilation, something that requires no energy in the dream; but because of that everything becomes more objective, so to speak, than in the dream, where the subject, absent from the start, colors and permeates everything that happens from the wings."[38] Similarly, Niedecker writes of "Canvass": "this procedure is directly opposite to that of the consistent and prolonged dream—in dream the simple and familiar words like prepositions, connectives, etc. . . . are not absent, in fact, noticeably present to show illogical absurdity, discontinuity, parody of sanity."[39] For the materialist surrealist, dream life is not free from the structures of narrative and power, but rather an intensification of them. Just as the intensification of subjective self-reflection affords a view of the psyche as object, dream life too produces its opposite—that is, a consciousness of the discontinuous and contradictory nature of waking narrative structures. Niedecker's experiments limn the beyond of the opposition between interiority and exteriority. Her early work, as a result, extends strategies of "objectification" as it develops surrealist tactics for survival in conditions of "unfreedom." Niedecker found her precarious position in these crosshairs of modernist practice a "disconcerting" but productive location from which to write. If we have now swept aside the critical commonplace that modernist poetics emerge only from the giddy cosmopolitan, then we too should find unsurprising the poet's ability to bring the differentiated spaces and times of modernism together, in Wisconsin.

"Next Year or I Fly My Rounds Tempestuous": Burning the Calendar of Days

Next Year is composed of small rectangles of papers carefully pasted over the middle of the twenty-seven pages of a 1935 devotional calendar, spanning the entire year from January to December. In shadowy lettered figures palimpsested beneath the handwritten serial poem, inspirational clichés about faith in god and ethical fortitude can just faintly be made out.[40] Received by Zukofsky on "Xmas 1934," the physical form of the poem is a parody of holiday exchange, and, more importantly, a deliberate retort to the routinization of language and affect that accompanies the banal progression of everyday life under the watch of calendar time. The blurred words that hover under this calendar *detourné* thrum spectrally with the hackneyed expressions that arrange and organize our experience of the temporal regimes of modernization. The curious materials of this serial poem also recall the work of feminist surrealists such as Meret Oppenheim, whose famous 1936 *Breakfast in Fur* layers fur over the tired shape of the familiar object of the teacup, and in doing so further dilates the space between domesticated consumption and the beastly unknown. Similarly, the contest between clichéd phrase and surrealist poetics points up the regressive and transformative nature of both respectively. We will return to a discussion of the overall, serial form of *Next Year* soon, informed first by a survey of its difficult contents.

After the initial encounter of *Next Year*'s resilient and thick opacity, the full work of the poem begins to yield what can only be referred to somewhat overbearingly as "themes." These ideational constellations are produced recursively, through the serial form's processual accumulations of meaning. *Next Year* revisits and compounds the issues concerning Niedecker's wider surrealist oeuvre: gender and authorial agency; the oft at odds forms of temporalities domestic and social; marriage and the pathologies of the heterosexual dyad; the disarticulated body and surrealist art practice. Indirect allusions to Zukofsky remind the reader of the poem's munificent status, but more importantly, of the extent to which the work enacts a dialogue between surreality and Zukofskian ideas of "objectivity."

"Wade all life / backward to its / source which / runs too far / ahead," writes Niedecker, opening January 1935 with a meditation on the multiple trajectories of historical time.[41] As the calendar embarks on a new year, we are instructed to move backward, toward the "source." While we wade back,

that mythical, originary river runs forward toward a historical vanishing point. Niedecker begins here with a disorienting critique of fictive historical narratives; she makes strange and illogical the watery metaphors of flowing time, which are used to naturalize the constructedness of calendar-rhythmed histories, and our experience of them. With an Objectivist's attention to the ideological valences of progress narratives and a chariness of myths whether of nature or history, Niedecker uses her surrealist forms to elaborate the burdens that these discourses bring to bear upon the individuated subject.

"The satisfactory/emphasis is on/revolving./Don't send/steadily; after/you know me/I'll be no one," appears scrawled over the second half of January.[42] As in the first entry, our approach to anything like an authentic origin only hastens its retreat. In this entry, "satisfactory emphasis" replaces the turn of phrase "satisfactory progress." Through this substitution Niedecker pairs narratives of inevitability with inflexible idioms emptied of meaning, as she also presses back against the increasing predictability of such idiomatic fusion. Instead, Niedecker "emphasizes" "revolving;" the choice of the gerund over the implied noun (revolution) bears the impress of the poet's interest in the process toward, rather than the punctual event of, historical transformation. Niedecker suggests instead a permanent lurch, characterized by its asymptotic approach to full knowledge. She warns that, "sending steadily," or unrelentingly seeking to "know," only threatens to erase her entirely into a "no one." And indeed, "no one" initiates a dialectic of knowledge complex in nature. On the one hand, the dissolution of self into universal anonymity registers an objection to any individuation predicated on the myth of a unique self, composed of undisclosed and inimitable qualities. On the other hand, "no one" speaks to the aggressive, negating effects of her addressee's instrumentalizing, and acquisitive, approach. When we activate both possibilities simultaneously we find that Niedecker leaves agency ambiguous: has she been erased, or did she, like the river, turn and run?

Other entries on the relationship between gender and knowledge are less ambiguous and more cutting: "her under-/standing of him/is more touch-/ing than intelli-/ gent; he holds/her knees with-/out her knowing/how she's boned" marks the transition from March to April.[43] The female subject's affectively driven form of "understanding" is compared to a more aggressive "touching"; the male "holds her knees" (apart?)— "boning" her. Her knowledge of others is tragically commensurate with her knowledge

of herself; a sentimental attitude eclipses both intellectual comprehension and somatic awareness. A sound shadow offers a subtle critique of heterosexual coupling and the restrictive fields of gender; is the female "bound" or "boned"? In May, Niedecker explores the masculinist, bourgeois subjectivity of her editor addressee, writing: "Don't worry/about the comma,/darling, nobody/ekes out a more/facile distend—/bathroom luxury".[44] In this entry, the (male) editor's insistent and obsessive punctuation correction allies with the presence of a "distended" phallic ego and a petty domestication, the latter manifesting itself in a desire for "bathroom luxuries." The lines lay bare the tensions of a domesticity articulated in the decorative prolix of prose; while it swells the gendered qualities of those whom it houses, it also contracts the possibilities for the expression of alternative, nondomestic forms of desire into the private space of toilet comforts.

"Bathroom luxuries" appear again in December: "Sweet ekes/of soft drips—/bathroom/luxuries."[45] Here Niedecker investigates a different kind of domesticity, one whose silence allows for the soft, sweet sound of a subtle form of accidental excess: a dripping faucet; or maybe, the plash of urine. This isolated particular might be less public, but it is no less historical. The river of time that opened the series has its tributary here, in the uncanny pleasure of a water faucet in need of repair, in a house losing its restraint.

Niedecker thus explores the interdependent structures of domestic decoration, normative gender relations, and standard narrative form. Through serialized, paratactical assemblage of these concerns, and the deliberate frustration of expectations for customary syntactical progression, Niedecker makes ludic the rituals of domestic life and heterocommunication. August's entry suggests alternatives, in its form and contents, to the highly codified state of affairs described in "Don't worry about the comma, darling." Niedecker writes in truncated truisms a surrealist poetry of the body, history, and freedom: "Good deed, my/love. The ele-/ment in folk-/time. Nerves/are my past/monogamy,/said her arms/going farther./Rock me out."[46] Actions and land, rather than affects and calendars, populate the historical conjuncture she terms "folktime." "Deed" expresses unromantically the convergence of intentional gestures and tract geographies of possession, soberly inflecting the "folk" with as much goodwill ("good deed") as ownership individualism.

The speaker, however, possesses nothing but "nerves"; shocking the reader out of an easy earthy nostalgia, the "past" is described in terms of an

unfree hysteria. Her arms reach out (we will find them still reaching, and recurring, through to the final lines in the series) past her past. The first lines explore the tension between two types of materiality in folklife—that field of action filled with human "deeds" and the geography of natural "elements" that surround those actors. Similarly tipping between discourses both social and natural, this passage ends with a complicated directive that calls on the many senses of "rock": stone; gentle, cradling action; a violent upset. In a feminist surreal where monogamy is equated with a nervous condition as opposed to a comforting interpossession, Niedecker describes the process of leaving, of change, as one that requires both startling upset and slow, careful departure. The domestic, familial, enclosing cradle swings unnervingly out of time, rocking Niedecker out of the familiar.

Family, folk, and the surreal body also combined earlier in May, that time prefaced by a reference: "Dalí's "Archaeological / Reminiscence of / Millet's Angelus"/ Strike a thrall. / Bring an ear- / drum up to a / laughing order / at spittle point. / For tipped aurals / and aluminum / casticulars."[47] Niedecker's interest in Dalí continued after her first viewing of his work during a visit to Zukofsky in the winter of 1933–34. The 1935 *Archaeological Reminiscence* was Dalí's surrealist interpretation of Jean-François Millet's 1859 realist painting of French peasants in a field at the end of their workday, reciting the final of the thrice daily Angelus devotion. Dalí's version transforms the praying peasants into towering liquidlike archaeological ruins, removed from their original context and placed in a desert landscape. The *Reminiscence* is a meditation on, among other things, the binding relationship between aesthetic vision and historical time. The family dyad represented by the devout Millet experiences time through the premodern rhythms of agricultural laborer and prayer. For the modern Dalí, time stretches over a vaster terrain, and the rendering of historical transformation through geographical displacement crystallizes in an "archaeological" sense that the present is a future ruin, a baleful mark of historical thinking in the age of capitalist modernization.

The allusion helps to illuminate Niedecker's presentation of "folktime" as at once a mode of production ordered by "good deeds" and a regularity out of which one wishes to be "rocked." Dalí's painting does "rock us out," historicizing the social content of the past by re-representing it in recognizably contemporary, innovative form. Niedecker too draws our attention to the historical forces that subtend "folk" order in the fierce phrase "strike a thrall." Here it is perhaps briefly worth noting that the hortative appears

repeatedly throughout *Next Year*. This formal device functions on the most manifest level as a parody of the potted daily advice preserved on the calendar beneath her words. The deployment of the hortative also has the effect of investing Objectivism's particulars with agency and intent; Niedecker here explores the material effects of language itself, measured by actions taken in response to demands. Indeed, "strike a thrall" functions as a differently rendered, active, Objectivist particular; voicing violence, it offers up an unsentimental view of the precapitalist past. In Niedecker's folkscene, then, whips, not prayers, maintain the status quo. Certainly a Depression-era reader would have noted—probably first—the sense of "strike" which suggests collective struggle rather than coercion. Through the invocation of these two, wildly divergent allusive reaches, Niedecker cultivates in her reader a consciousness of the historicity of language itself, a historicity shot through with servitude, and struggle.

The second hortative of this passage openly thematizes its form: "bring an eardrum up to a laughing order at spittle point," bodying forth a demand ("order") that is at once whispered intimately between ear and mouth and hysterically conveyed from sputtering lips. What do we hear? "Tipped aurals and aluminum casticulars," or, the sounds ("aurals") capsized or "tipped" in the industrial din of modernity's "aluminum casticulars." Niedecker throws up a beguiling neologism: "casticulars." Zukofsky's "historic and contemporary particulars" assume a metallic form, sculptured, or "cast" in aluminum. Even in their modern form, these particulars still bear the traces of Millet's older social order, where caste determines position. They also, however, radiate the historical glow of their contemporary moment, "cast" into being by labor itself to become the "cast" in a theater of history.

Niedecker's poetic adaptation of the painterly arts resurfaces again in October: "Van Gogh's/'Bar'—/In all free states/the selves un-/mix and walk/the table's/length."[48] Niedecker here alludes to Vincent van Gogh's 1888 painting *The Night Café,* which depicts a pool table exaggerated in size, surrounded by patrons seated separately from one another at small tables around the perimeter of the scene. When some are seated by two, it is abjectly clear they are drunken noncommunicants. Niedecker's preoccupation with the experimental visual arts of France, again, places her in a broader, transatlantic community of feminist surrealists emerging from the post-Realist French avant-garde. Niedecker poetically remediates van Gogh's piece, as she does in her treatment of Dalí's *Archaeological Reminiscence*, entering it askance from the perspective of the American modernist.

In a Marxian play on the nature of "free states," Niedecker links racial segregation with alienation. Niedecker employs the nineteenth century term for those states without legalized slavery; the individuated "selves" of these "free states" ironically "unmix," much as *The Night Café*'s patrons symbolize the isolation that obtains in the purportedly public sphere of the café. Niedecker proffers a critical undoing of that universal, "freedom," by exploring its specific and contradictory pre-Civil War status. As she applies the weight of history to this term, it reveals a social truth about the asymmetries of formal freedom and real freedom; "in all free states" their subjects nevertheless act unfree and unreflectively, isolated and ambulatory in body ("they walk the length of the table") but not in mind. Furniture, like States, it seems, both arranges and displaces social bodies. Indeed, van Gogh's painting renders a table so large that it threatens to push the patrons out of the painting. Instead of providing an opportunity for social interaction, the table forms a chasm between people, reproducing individuals *qua* individuals. Its appearance reflects its social status rather than its empirical dimensions; as the "selves" walk the table's length, the contours of the object regulate their movements and delimit their horizon of experience.

In an expansive revolt against this unfree freedom, Niedecker writes ecstatically "Jesus, I'm/going out/and throw/my arms/around" in the December entry.[49] This Christmastime pronouncement closes the calendar, and provides a useful lens through which to look back upon the series as a whole. "Out," exits Niedecker, into an aleatory space of negation. This final line enacts the transformation implied in the August entry of ". . . her arms going farther. Rock me out." The body stretches beyond domesticated space; outside, arms flap in prelude to a tempestuous flight. We cannot help but notice that the body is also a site of militancy; the poet is "armed" and poised toward a messianic, revolutionary rebirth. In the service of finding such freedoms, the poems of *Next Year* reveal, then graffiti, the idioms, expressions and syntactical units that become naturalized with habit; as Niedecker writes in February, "If you circle/the habit of/your meaning,/it's fact and/no harm/done."[50] Niedecker rearranges common speech patterns, "it's fact" and "no harm done," flummoxing linguistic practices produced by habit and history.

Niedecker's serial work differs in interesting ways from that of the other Objectivist we have examined working in this medium: Oppen's *Discrete Series*. Oppen, together with his wife, Mary, encountered his particulars in itinerant, cinematic fashion, making strange the habituated topographies

of city and country. By contrast, Niedecker's diary-like forms emerge from the space of the private, bearing the mark of an unsentimental approach to an interior life whose particulars other (male) Objectivists leave rather unparsed. The diary will of course become a gift, which becomes a more, but by no means entirely, public dialogue with Zukofsky, and, I would argue, a meditation on both the potentials and boundaries of a specifically Objectivist materialism.

The thick palimpsests of Niedecker's calendar hew critically to Zukofsky's careful definition of objectification, which, we recall, involves "the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object." He extends a caveat: "That is: distinct from print which records an action and existence and incites the mind to further suggestion, there exists, tho it may not be harbored as solidity in the crook of an elbow, writing (audibility in two-dimensional print) which is an object or affects the mind as such."[51] This, then, is the crux of objectification. As opposed to, say, a "print" newspaper, carried "in the crook of an elbow," objectification involves a constructivist "writing" and process potentiating the necessarily aural ("audibility") excitation of thought. Writing as record, for Zukofsky, might cause the mind to wander; objectified writing attempts a more ambitious, though nonpredatory, intervention into the subject's mental life. The writing-object is a fashioned totality that goes further than suggestion; it leaves no ideological remainder as it captures and transforms the subject's entire perceptual life. Niedecker's surrealist strategies for defamiliarizing reified hypotactical forms thus bring to the Objectivist project a consciousness that the poet's language is itself shaped by social and historical forces. As such, poetic language is the still distant but blood relative of the "writing as record" Zukofsky suspects as appearing deceptively unmediated. As the transformative work of objectification happens, the shadows of hackneyed phraseology and empty meanings hover behind the new poetics, announcing the always incomplete status of Niedecker's avant-garde project.[52]

If Niedecker is less enthusiastic about the ability of art to work fresh meanings and structures into the subject, it is, at least in part, for feminist reasons. For the feminist Objectivist, the sexist social relations that persist beneath the visible reality of particulars are a part of the materiality of language and life, and as such, exceedingly difficult to corrode. The surrealist skepticism of "immediate" experience, when merged with Objectivist sincerity, makes Niedecker's poetic practice one that attends equally to the material plane and to the social structures which shape representation and

appearance. Pace Oppen, Niedecker brings to seriality a surrealist consciousness that mistrusts each and every appearance. Where Oppen meets the limits of his avant-gardism in the repeated alignment of gender stereotypes and aesthetic approaches to the female subject, Niedecker is mindful that her own relationship to the world she encounters is already structured by such regimes, however difficult to discern in the "fog" of their shadowy ubiquity, of ideological expectations and social orders. Niedecker's calendar poetry is less an Oppenian record of found objects and places than a "tempestuous" rearrangement of the routinized, looping movements that "rounds" implies. "Tempestuous" describes both nature and relationships: *Next Year*'s project is to reveal the social architecture substructuring our experience of even the most circadian of rhythms. The witch Niedecker evokes in her title conducts her "rounds" with the goal of transforming seemingly natural structures into disjointed, and reassembled, indices of social pressures and influence.

Conclusion: Transatlantic Wisconsin

In *Compulsive Beauty,* Hal Foster writes that "the surrealist concern with the marvellous and the uncanny, with the return of familiar images made strange by repression, is related to the Marxian concern with the outmoded and the nonsynchronous, the persistence of old cultural forms in the uneven development of productive modes and social formations; more, that the first supplies what the second can not do without: its subjective dimension."[53] Niedecker's "folktime" scores the ideological inverse of bourgeois "progress" narratives. "Folktime," that temporal regime belonging to the residual, the peripheral, benefits from no romanticization; its function is not to provide a nostalgic alternative to capitalist modernity but rather to negate the utter banality of that system's triumphalist universalism. The poet's surrealist work returns time and again to the particulars and rhythms of the rind that limns the capitalist core: an outhouse in Wisconsin; owled rafters; the hillocked topography of the country within a country. Foster's observation alerts us to the ways in which surrealists exploit the synchrony of the nonsynchronous to de-repress the violence that subtends the cozy familiarity of contemporary social relations and object worlds. Niedecker's Objectivist Surrealism indeed explores the "subjective dimension" of uneven development; it also rubs the impress of such unevenness on subjectivity itself, which, if we recall, is itself instructured by a thick history of "thought replacements."

Both Niedecker's own peripheral emplacement and her deployment of ruralism and nature suggest, however, that the nonemergent sectors of unevenness that energize her poetic parallax are much more than "outmoded"; they are themselves endlessly produced and reproduced by the incongruities of capitalist spatial regimes and the narratives that strive to maintain them. Jameson describes how, for Heidegger, it is precisely these places and symbolic mediations of "underdevelopment" that nourish a healthy alienation from the discursive regimes roosting and birthing in the "white domes" of power:

> [Heidegger] . . . reverses the usual view of uneven development in which 'tradition' is marked as what will inevitable give way to the new that is destined to overcome and replace it . . . the familiarity of what can only anachronistically be called the pre-modern, or underdevelopment, confers on the violence of the new its capacity for arousing fear or excitement . . . what matters is not so much the positive or negative valence of this reaction, but rather the aesthetic epistemology of the shock itself, which could not be registered against a background in which machinery had already become familiar and domesticated.[54]

What do we understand by Jameson's use of *anachronistically* here? Why would the descriptive temporal marker of the "pre-modern" index some error in our historical consciousness? Because what seems to be "pre-modern" is, in actuality, flourishing at a shared pace with the spreading and deepening of capitalism's appropriation and transformation of space. Were we to stop mis-recognizing the "pre-modern" as residual, we might rechristen it *the mirror of the modern* without which the "new," or, for Niedecker, narratives of progress, could not be made strange and "renarrativized." The very power of the periphery lies in its ability to point up the limits of capital, the ways in which its violence will never "become familiar and domesticated." Niedecker's alembic of avant-gardes from both the American and Continental urban cores flows forth from a transatlantic Wisconsin, a periphery of our interior stitched into, and pitched against a world system that will require the countryside for its domination, and destruction.

5 Zukofsky
Counterfetishistic Literacy

The previous chapters visited Objectivism's theater of confrontation, where it, by turns sober and wildly imaginative, faced off with tumultuous, uneven developments and resiliently undead commodities. In battling these mediations of Depression-era American crisis capitalism, Objectivism poses a deeply strategic and utopian question: what kind of poetics are adequate to the collectives and individuals radicalized in this moment? Objectivists sing in a chorus of cultural workers and poets, who, like John Beecher, a New Dealer and anti-racist organizer whose work finds common cause with the "proletarian poetry" movement, ask in 1934:

> What future tide will free
> these captives of their history?[1]

In this chapter, I use the conceptual lens of mediation to explore the ways in which Zukofsky's Objectivist poetic forms screen the convocation of a revolutionary subject acting on behalf of such futures. Mediation has of course enjoyed a long history of philosophical inquiry. For our purposes, let us adopt the following definition: mediation is the asymmetric but mutually constitutive relation of the subject and the object. Zukofsky's short poems from *55 Poems* (1923–35) and *Anew* (1935–44) reveal a modernism concerned to distend and occupy the space between the subject and the object, so that the subject might position itself knowingly in, and often, against, a world that has made it, as Beecher would have it, "captive." Such a subject, loosed ever so slightly from the grip of the social entrapments of an inexorable historical "progress," experiences a wondrous, and difficult, responsibility to a newly conceptualized post-capitalist freedom. Jameson describes this consciousness in detail:

> Whenever the concept of freedom is once more understood, it always comes as the awakening of dissatisfaction in the midst of all that is—at one, in that with the birth of the negative itself: never a state that is enjoyed, or a mental structure that is contemplated, but rather an ontological impatience in which the constraining situation itself is for the first time perceived in the very moment in which it is refused . . . a sudden perception of an intolerable present which is at the same time . . . the glimpse of another state in the name of which the first is judged. Thus the idea of freedom involves a kind of perceptual superposition; *it is a way of reading* the present, but it is a reading that looks more like the reconstruction of an extinct language.[2]

It is precisely the heady adventures of this very moment that we will seek to explore with Zukofsky, whose poems both require and encourage a "way of reading" that emboldens a revolutionary literacy.

Few would argue with the statement that Anglo-American modernism addressed a crisis within realism, which could no longer adequate the descriptive language of an earlier moment with a contemporary, polyglot scene of cultural contestation, class war, and anti-imperialism. If the reader of realism noticed the mediating intercessor of language itself, it was to praise stylistic virtuosity or representational vérité. One of modernism's interventions was to draw attention to the less comforting aspects of language as mediation: when it obfuscates, contradicts, distorts, refracts, sells, and propagandizes. What might prove more controversial, perhaps, is the following proposition: the anti-capitalist modernist transforms the potentially solipsistic linguistic self-reflexivity of high modernism into a critical self-reflexivity. In this latter intensity of consciousness, the subject comprehends the ways in which she is, and is not, the active impress of events, socialities, and histories not of her making, and through that comprehension, apprehends even and especially herself as one of the many material mediations she surveys in the world. Zukofsky's poetic embodiment of this process serves revolutionary ends: the engendering of a subject for whom the arrangement of everyone and everything does not appear as the result of contingency but rather as the necessary negative image of the contradictions of capitalism.

The poetic practice of making mediations manifest thus enjoins the reader in an intellectual operation that transforms her from observer whose periscope emerges from an isolated self into an actor whose aperture faces without, and within. This conscripted reader achieves such panavision at a cost she is content to pay; she relinquishes one of modernity's chief antino-

mies, designed to produce constricting accounts of subject formation that foreclose political action. In the face of such antinomies, we careen between lawless, hyperindividuated voluntarism and its verso face, impassive determination by forces both social and natural. A subject newly aware of the mutually constitutive relations of subject and object world protests modernity's signature accounts of subjection to become the (trans- and plural-gendered) subject of this recognizable passage from Marx's *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte:* "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."[3] Throughout the course of this chapter, it will be useful to keep these "transmissions from the past," in mind; preexisting combined and uneven developments, in dialectical tandem with the dead labor obscured by the commodity form, structure the mediations that the subject must confront. For example, throughout *Anew*, such asymmetrical developments corrugate the landscape beneath subjects and objects, pointing up that any one hegemonic account of our relation to these uneven territories of capital is but an uncomfortable amalgam of contradictory mediations. It will be our pleasure to see how Zukofsky's short poems hatch, and recruit, the subject's coming-to-consciousness as a self given to mapping and reappropriating a whole Earth. We are used to speaking about poetry as a mediation of its social surroundings; *Anew* asks us to consider what happens not only when poetry is the subject of mediation but mediation is the subject of poetry.

Combined and Uneven Developments Rend Open the Myth of Modernity's Progress

We begin our study of *Anew* "in the midst" of the replacement of the Great Depression by a war economy:

11

In the midst of things
One scotch and soda, and
Happy Birthday! have you
Been walking in DICKEYVILLE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
DEVELOPMENT?
They turned
The walls of an old mill

There into a house.
VOICE OF THE HOUSE-DOOR
(Speaking after Catullus):
Sees all—
Time brings the guy with red eyebrows
In love with the Mrs. Of this house
Who had her husband
After she had his father

(Pitying itself considerably)
Dazh the nizhest poem
I ever wrote exshepting
All the other nizher poems.[4]

Written in 1941, *Anew*'s eleventh poem energizes its materials—peri post-Depression-era American cultural and physical topographies—to explore how geographical and historical asymmetries arrive to consciousness mediated by wildly diverse forms of ethnicity, domesticity, and spatial regimes. The structure of the poem has three distinct parts: the first poses an in medias res interrogative about "DICKEYVILLE," an eighteenth-century theme village on the periphery of Baltimore. The second stanza condenses Catullus's *Carmen 67*, a closet drama in poesy consisting of a conversation with a door, in which the door discloses in detail the sexual practices of the household. In the final section, Zukofsky supplements the Catullus poem by rendering the door's envoi in Yiddish dialect. The tripartite structure offers a madrigal of historical particulars in which early America is reprised through contemporary pastiche, classical archaic, and contemporary Jewish urban. As the poem unfolds, each section recursively informs its predecessor. In particular, the retroactive installation of the contemporary working-class Jewish voice initiates a massive historical parallax that reveals uneven development as a structuring logic not only of Depression-era America, but also of the ways in which modernism adapts the classical forms it takes as its signature.

The poem opens by positioning itself among the currents of history. We begin with a deceptive levity, celebrating "in the midst of things" (these "things" including "one scotch and soda"). The enjambment of "and" and "Happy birthday!" renders fungible the anniversary and these "things;" the passage of life itself cannot escape the grip of commerce. The topic of conversation—Dickeyville—urges a comparison between the paratactically

presented scenes of national geography and those of personal biography. In 1934, a property "development" corporation bought the once textile boomtown Dickeyville. By that time, Dickeyville was thoroughly impoverished; its acquisition is one of those punctual metonyms that offers a powerful periodization of economic life. Dickeyville becomes an abject example in the dialectic of history Zukofsky's poem sketches. The site is a placeholder for Depression-era economic transition; when its manufacturing base withered away, it submitted to a different kind of accumulative process where land was produced simply as *real estate*, or engridded space. The development company's acquisition initiated two interdependent, if seemingly opposed, processes: it reintroduced Dickeyville into the circulatory vessels of capital, revivifying it as a source of extraction and profit, while at the same time, it produced Dickeyville as a permanent archaicism, purifying its residual characteristics of contemporary reference. Frozen in historical amber, Dickeyville possesses indexical status, flagging a transformation in the economic substrate through its forcible excision from the organic tissues of the present.

Dickeyville's historical petrifaction offers a sobering recursive meditation on the preceding birthday celebration, which turns out, in retrospect, to be something less than a maturation and more like a ritual both repetitive and consumptive in nature. The yoking together of Dickeyville and the "birthday" is stamped with modernist disdain for the torpor of historical repetition and pastiche. The space of the domestic is hardly an autochthonous household economy; rather it is the sepulcher of the creative destruction of the means of production, where "they turned/The walls of an old mill/There into a house." History compels its ahistoricity. The process of Dickeyville's transformation takes on an exceptionally reified air, in which the developers are nameless and the processes of transformation are almost magical. This poetic embodiment screens the contradictory ironies of housing "development" where development means de-development and/or the establishment of curiouser and curiouser spatial fixes. The typographical hysteria of uppercase lock suggests a "development" characterized by a stolid immovability. The road sign, in its loud insistence on the renewed immediacy of the eighteenth century, inadvertently permits a negation of the cozy archaicism: the "development" makes the mediation of history acutely, and literally, *legible* by dint of its pointing up the anomalous adjacencies that make up the geography of crisis.

The second stanza summons the classical-archaic to counterpoint this imaginary cultural and economic corrective to the Depression-era crisis of

overaccumulation, which appears in the form of the compensatory hyper-development of land emparceled by domestic unit. In the extremely bawdy source Catullus poem, *Carmen 67*, the house itself confesses the secrets of its inhabitants, revealing that the "Mrs." of the house has cuckolded her husband by having sex with his father. The door also reports, and refuses to name, a mysterious man with red eyebrows ("rubra supercilia"), about whom the wife has boasted to the household staff. The adaptation of the Catullus poem points up, with some ribaldry, the erotic latencies within the name "DICKEYVILLE," to which it harks back through shared uppercase form. The door speaks from a time before reification; its historical field makes possible, in general, a kind of poesis that appears ludic under modern capitalism, one which might seek to disclose the inner contradictions of domesticity—such as acts of incest and infidelities. In conjuring Catullus, Zukofsky calls upon the specific contingencies of pre-capitalist uneven development wherein some future elements of capitalism in full swing are already in existence (such as the family and its domestic space, as a principle mode of social organization) while others still gestate (such as the fully lacquered ideology of the nonlibidinal family). The awkward togetherness of these various elements rends open a space from which we might limn, and transgress, the presently barbed boundaries of private property.

In the final stanza, the house door is reported to have a kind of melancholic self-consciousness ("pitying itself considerably") which finds its vernacular in the specificity of Zukofsky's own family history; it speaks, it seems, English with a Yiddish accent. The door's racialized, nonassimilated speech replaces the soft "c" with consonant pairs, and in doing so, merges with voice of the author-poet. An object here speaks with an accent, (presumably loosened by "scotch"), and in doing so, effects a conceptual entwining of de-reification with the ironic distance produced, in part, by a life on the margins. The poem—which, as we've seen, excoriates both development masquerading as progress and the family that structures the new-old space of "Dickeyville"—is anything but "nice."

Several mediations convene to structure these negations. Indeed, the final stanza constructs an ironic prism out of the sounds of three voices: the "door," the author, and his immigrant father. This ironic turn tonally upends expectations that the working-class immigrant reader will eschew poetic abstractions in favor of traditional poetic turn and decoration ("niceness"). Zukofsky first recruits the "nice" aesthetics of the picturesque for their refusal to affirm art's arid autonomy, and then subjects these very aesthetics to

aggressive irony. The ironies of that final stanza expose as arbitrary the evaluative algebras of competitive ("nizher") and superlative ("nizhest") philologies while simultaneously inferring the undesirability of nonconfrontational levity in the face of gross and violent economic and social contradiction.

"Dickeyville" functions as symbolic exemplar of developmental transition in the post-Depression era; the "door" widens the lesson of this example, urging that the reading of any symbol involves its apprehension not only as an index of contemporary contradiction but as a mediation of a longer, diachronic history. Adorno describes compactly how the first moment of placing objects *in relation* opens onto a second moment, wherein cognition becomes truly radicalized, and poised to read the present-day capitalist social world as the latest sedimentation of deep and long-standing prior contradictions. He writes that "the history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic potential of the object in its relation to other objects—by the actualization and concentration of something which is already known and is transformed by that knowledge. Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object."[5] Here Adorno explores the ways in which the subject draws on, and transforms, already existing stores of knowledge (the "already known") through the study of the relationality between things. Once adept at knitting adjacencies into a synchronic fabric of connected contrasts ("the constellation"), the subject then attains to the "cognition" of the historical "process stored in the object." This sounds very much like a record of our own travels thus far. At first we found "Dickeyville," whose walls were those of former mills; then a "door" opened onto an even longer history that turned out to hold together even the most disparate historical particulars, from the speech acts of American immigrants to the adulterous practices of that society that would give us the *familia*.

The first declension of revolutionary literacy ends with this meeting point of present and past; it also concludes this section and introduces our next study, in which we exfoliate yet more history from the thick skins of everyday objects. This time a washstand, rather than a door, will provide a perhaps unlikely path between subject and the world.

The Commodity Form Parallax: Revolutionary Consciousness, Mediated by the Coin

Zukofsky's poem "To my wash-stand" (1932), from the collection *55 Poems* (1923–35), is acutely concerned with the process by which the subject

arrives at the capacity to position itself within a larger totality. This work sets such a process in motion only after a thorough accounting of the commodity form as *the* primary mediation of all perceptual, political and social life under capitalism. First a brief redaction of the poem: the poet stages an internal conversation with himself during his morning ablutions at a washstand and mirror. In this dialogue, described as "a song/ entirely in my head," the poet uses the washstand as an object to mediate and compress the distance between the unseen domestic practices of a citywide working-class collective and his own equally private self-care. The poem begins with an address to the porcelain pedestal itself:

> To my wash-stand
> in which I wash
> my left hand
> and my right hand
>
> To my wash-stand
> whose base is Greek
> whose shaft
> is marble and is fluted
>
> To my wash-stand
> whose wash-bowl
> is an oval
> in a square
>
> To my wash-stand
> whose square is marble
> And inscribes two
> smaller ovals to left and right for soap
>
> Comes a song of
> water from the right faucet and the left
> my left and my
> right hand mixing hot and cold.
>
> Comes a flow which
> if I have called a song
> is a song
> entirely in my head[6]

Witness here the somber restoration of use value to the washstand, shirred of the more ecstatic fantasies of immediacy which usually attend such a renovation. But before the wash-stand might offer a bridge between the individual and the collective, it must first tell the history of its own Classical, and phallic, aesthetic presentation ("whose base is Greek/whose shaft/is marble and is fluted). In this way, the poem displaces one obfuscatory mediation—the washstand as fetishizable commodity—with considerably more candescent ones: the washstand's registration of a long history of aesthetic forms, which are themselves in turn mediated by the intimate contours of the body itself.

The speaker combines water from the adjacent faucet spouts, bringing forth ". . . . a song of/water from the right faucet and the left" with his "left and . . . right hand mixing hot and cold." The chiasmic structure of these lines (where A = right and B = left, ergo ABBA) formally enacts this totalizing admixture. Through this motion, the bather introduces his own body as a mediation necessary to the object, without which the washstand's fount cannot flow. Next, the poet addresses himself in the mirror, and in doing so, inaugurates what I have been suggesting that we call a "critical self-reflection," wherein the subject begins to operate as one with the fray of mediations it perceives:

> a song out of imagining
> modillions descried above
> my head a frieze
> of stone completing what no longer
>
> is my wash-stand
> since its marble has completed
> my getting up each morning
> my washing before going to bed
>
> my look into a mirror
> to glimpse half an oval
> as if its half
> were half-oval in my head and the
>
> climates of many
> inscriptions human heads shapes'
> horses' elephants' (tusks) others'
> scratched in marble tile[7]

This moment of self-recognition is irretrievably bound to the poem's larger resolve to (1) locate this subject-self in relation to the objects upon which it depends for self-expression, and (2) introduce a prehistory of expressive forms. The poem then works along two historical axes: its contemporary horizon, symbolized in and through the domestic ablutions of the working class, and the precapitalist aesthetic forms of classical Greek ornamentation. If these stanzas historicize the emergence of a critical self-reflection, then the poem's final eight stanzas politicize the same, showing how it is born to oppose the mediations of the commodity form:

> so my wash-stand
> in one particular breaking of the
> tile at which I have
> looked and looked
>
> has opposed to my head
> the inscription of a head
> whose coinage is the
> coinage of the poor
>
> observant in waiting
> in their getting up mornings
> and in their waiting
> going to bed
>
> carefully attentive
> to what they have
> and to what they do not
> have
>
> when a flow of water
> doubled in narrow folds
> occasions invertible counterpoints
> over a head and
>
> an age in a wash-stand
> and in their own heads[8]

The poet excavates from the washstand an archaic ur-mimetic, in which animality (horses, elephants) and the anthropomorphic (human heads) co-

habit, not yet divorced from one another by the Great Chain of Being. This fluid cohabitation finds its contemporary afterimage in a reunification where seemingly direct observations (the "glimpse [of] half an oval") are really the blended effects of human, discursive projections ("as if its half/ were half-oval in my head") and actually existing data. The washer's historicization of the objects of perception begets a parsing of the degree to which he invests them with the data of his own consciousness. The contents of the room begin "breaking" open under the weight of this dialectical reconciliation of self with history, falling away to reveal the class war of the contemporary moment, and "the coinage of the poor" pours forth from its fissures.

The double meaning of "coinage"—by turns a newly born language and the minting of monetary species—promises that on the reverse side of the commodity form appear new modes of popular expression and poetic form adequate to its decoding. The speaker starts at the counterpoint of ("opposed" to) a broader collective, and only a deciphering of not less than two mediations—the "inscription" and its "coinage"—can reconcile self and society. This interpretive work requires some caution, as all the while, that other "head," or capital, keeps a watchful eye. Nevertheless, the archaic, by dint of its estranging historical parallax, dehabituates the present. We find the "poor" at this historical contact point between the archaic and the contemporary; they are "observant" in their "waiting." The potentials of presecular religious fidelity are wrested from their service to things as they are and given over to a working class keenly observing the world and anticipating a historical opening. Similarly, the oft-servile "attentive" is revalenced to record an active recognition of inequality, expropriation, and exploitation, where the poor take a stern accounting of "what they have/ and . . . what they do not/ have." The poet's watery baptism in the shared company of this reflective collective "occasions invertible counterpoints "—the difficult phrase suggesting acrobatics of sulci.

In linear algebra (one of Zukofsky's many mathematical touchstones), the invertible is that which is capable of being reversed, and that which is not invertible is desolately singular, lost in its own radical particularity. The recognition of the self in the mirror, which is also a window to an unseen collective, "occasions" the negation of the subject as singular. In the last two ecstatic lines, an open embrace of the washstand as a good mediation between individual and collective class consciousness rescues it from its status as mere commodity. Through the aspiration of its use value, the washstand

buttresses a permeable mirror through which to view a dawn of a kind of historical thinking that discerns the characteristics of "an age" in what were only recently just the entropies of time.

Marx, too, uses the trope of the mirror to describe the curious nature of relationality under commodity rule. Here he traces the process by which linen, as commodity, finds unlikely fraternity with objects both distant and seemingly unrelated:

> The value of a commodity, the linen for example, is now expressed in terms of innumerable other members of the world of commodities. *Every other physical commodity now becomes the mirror of the linen's value.* It is thus that this value first shows itself as being, in reality, a congealed quantity of *undifferentiated human labour*. For the labour which creates it is now explicitly presented as labour which counts as the equal of every other sort of human labour, whatever natural form it may possess, hence whether it is objectified in a coat, in corn, in iron, or in gold. The linen, by virtue of the form of value, no longer stands in a social relation with merely one other kind of commodity, but with the whole world of commodities as well. As a commodity it is a citizen of that world.[9]

Zukofsky's encyclopedic familiarity with Marx's corpus prevents us from underestimating its influence as an ur-text for, at minimum, the poet's work in the 1930s and into the '40s. Indeed, the mirror of value Marx describes functions much like the mirror in "To my wash-stand," where the endless, fungible mediations entrained by abstract equivalence become the basis for their very overcoming. Such fungibility finds its opposite opened up by a survey of interceding mediations that brick a path of the far more organic connections between the poet and the unseen bodies of the working class. Marx's mirror captures how the amputation of use value produces in the object "a congealed quantity of undifferentiated human labor," wherein the manner in which labor is "objectified" has no bearing whatsoever on the value of that object. In a sardonic cry against the loss of the commodity's unique properties, Marx christens its birth as "citizen of that world," that is, a world of orphaned objects for sale. The commodity suggests a form of global sociality that relies, rather unfortunately, on the alienation of the producers from their products. Zukofsky borrows the commodity's worlding tendencies for opposite ends: to imagine solidarities between producers separated both by space and by the obdurate reifications of their products.

Learning to read the commodity's forms of appearance comprises the cornerstone in Objectivism's pedagogy of the oppressed. Zukofsky poaches

these forms in the service of negations wider and wider still. The medium that trafficked in effacing the specific character of the individual laborer becomes the very "coin" with which the individual subject can supersede its own form of appearance as an isolated monad. In the most ambitious version of its project, Zukofskian Objectivism seeks to gestate a subject that seizes the opportunity that the commodity form offers through its very obfuscations: the disclosure of all existing mediations, including those that constitute the person herself.

Eight poems later in *29 Songs*, "'Further than'—" dilates the aesthetic and analytic practices unleashed by this confrontation with the thick-skinned mediations of the commodity form. In the poem that follows, the speaker still remains physically within the space of the private domestic bathroom, yet his subjects encompass the worldly arenas of nature, mathematics, and political economy, respectively. The first section induces natural images from the mixture of "water" and dirt ("tar") that make the bathroom landscape especially suited for painterly images:

> Further than the wash-stand
> three mountains in one bathroom
> The mountains on the floor, sea-bed
> rock, colored design; Five figures, chance
> smudges, perhaps tar, in the mountains; Six
> and Five figures in the waters under
> and above them. Each figure[10]

The second section turns to Cartesian mathematical coordinates to provide the preceding natural images with dimensional precision:

> is an ordinate of which the axis
> is a peak, The Whole Peak, from summit
> thru base to inverted altitude, depth beneath
> sea level.[11]

The final section resituates the speaker in the domestic scene, and laments the alienation of the subject from its world such that it remains confined to the dubious comfort of its toilette. The last lines gesture toward the conditions of possibility in which subject's consciousness might be made adequate to that vaster totality:

> Only drying from the shower is
> exploration possible, the chances

of world monopoly have been so carefully
seized that only on the other side of
one's bathroom nothing is foreign. Unless
charting the antarctic has something to do
with figures the heads of which are
just smudges away from the axis of abscissas
or one is merely exploring from a shower
expectant that today or tomorrow must
bring the new economic anatomization.[12]

As a whole, the movement of the poem traces the free movements of speculative thought, and there discovers a post-capitalist future where the contemplative is no longer privatized and restricted to the individual mind but rather restored to a collective *body*. The first stanza raises "mountains" from a mixture of the work day's detritus ("tar") and water from a tiled floor that is likened to "sea-bed rock," "colored" in its "design." The depiction of the natural world integrates contingency ("chance smudges") with mathematical precision, its coordinates first described horizontally ("on the floor"), then vertically ("Five figures in the waters under and above them"). The figures' emplacement in the hills ("Five figures, chance smudges, perhaps tar, in the mountains") radios the guerilla-subversion gestating in the imaginative life of our contemplative speaker. "Figures" might refer to, among other things: literary tropes; human or other bodies shadowy or illumed; and sums of money, numerically presented. The final meaning persists only residually, withering away beneath the shadow cast by a subject pointed in the direction of a history and place "further" than the horizons of capital's general equivalent.

The speaker of "To my wash-stand" emerges only after a double reconciliation: first, with a collective accessed by his newly solidaristic imagination, and second, with his own status as a prismatic mediation of that larger totality. In its adaptation of this sequence, which we first encountered in the source poem "To my wash-stand," "'Further than'—," enacts a hinge between the adequation of self and nature. The "mountains" form from shedded exfoliations of skin and dirt, heralding a restoration of the body and the landscapes of nature. That said, these "figures," the poet's symbolic systematization of apparently "chance" elements of his bodily excrescences, are more construct than found nature. In this moment, the speaker is both a subject and an object of his world. Such a world is at once an extension of

self *and* a storm of contingencies whose acquisition happens only through figurative practices developed to comprehend its arrangement.

Zukofsky, as usual, energizes mathematics as exemplary of that special amalgam of figuration's creative agency and the rigors of structure. Vertical coordinates grant depth to this synchronic collision of bather and nature. Each "figure" perches at a meeting point of the horizontal x axis (the "ordinate") and the y axis (the "abscissa"). An "axis" bisects each figure, terminating in a "Whole Peak" that extends equally into the air as it does the water. This algebraic spatiality retroactively engrids the earlier figures found "in the waters under/and above." As veterans of the commodity analytic, whose very form cautions against the casual inspection of mere appearance, we welcome the strategic deployment of these mediating maths, which permit, by way of their very abstractions, the apprehension of that which is not directly visible. The hidden, refracted "inverted altitude" submerged "beneath" sight ("sea") is now, almost impossibly, made available to cognition. The image proposes a speculative archaeology, conducted along a vertical vein, and resembles the Marxian metaphorization of materiality in which sub- and superstructure engage in perpendicular play.

The poem's emphasis on verticality retrieves the complexity of Marx's original formulation from clumsier hands, revealing that plumbing the "depths" beyond appearance involves more than the arduous peeling away of surfaces. Rather, going deeper requires the development of an imaginative calculus necessary to coax the previsible from the visible. The framing of this invisibility through an "inverted altitude" adds further dimension to the "invertible counterpoints" we saw in "To my wash-stand." The first poem bound its speaker laterally to an unseen collective; in its supplement, his enhanced vision now possesses a penetrative depth of perception. The totality ("The Whole Peak") is the cresting together of the coordinates of the "figure." This totality rises from the belongingness of the genitive ("of which the axis is a peak"), and its apprehension depends upon the "exploration" of the figure and its precise position within the mathematical grid. Bearing a strong resemblance to Jameson's account of "cognitive mapping," the process of totalizing here requires a ceaseless and continual calibration with an ever-growing set of spatial coordinates.

The final stanza treats the political stakes of such mapping, invoking a subject pregnant ("expectant") with no less than the future history of communism. With access to a unified vision presently "seized" by those who would "monopolize" rather than transform it, much depends on the sub-

ject's desire and ability to explore the everyday, and to perceive what the "shower" is trying to "show." The presently nefarious collusion of contingency ("chances") with capital ("world monopoly") means that the subject must seek out those spaces where chance appearance can still be organized and arranged by analytics that do not seek to territorialize, homogenize, and acquire: like the watery "smudges" on the poem's bathroom floor. As the subject dries, he is able to explore. It is a space that is briefly all his own, and against a world of enemy monopolies that render "foreign" all the world around him. It is a space, too, in which a racialized subject might repose, safe from discourses that link the Jewish diaspora to global "monopolies."

The cautiously hopeful enjambment "unless" suggests possible conditions that might allow (1) for private bathroom explorations to link up with those beyond its walls, and, following that, (2) for such explorations to find their destination in social transformation. The poem imagines a world in which the speculative imaginings and mathematical cartographies of a bathroom occupant reconcile, or have "something to do," with the only seemingly more world-historical "charting the antarctic." Indeed, the first third of the twentieth century saw a great many explorations of Antarctica. That scientific inquiry was concerned not with alleviating some of the worst Depression-era effects of uneven development but rather with the seemingly less pressing task of surveying one of the lowest yielding areas on the planet suggests that while this reconciliation of speculation and science is desirable and necessary, it belongs to the projects of a post-scarcity future.

To make that future possible requires this humble ("merely") work of the revolutionary imagination and the aesthetic formulations it liberates while "exploring from the shower." The gentle tension between desire ("expectant") and the inexorable ("must bring") dramatizes affectively that the anticapitalist shares with big history the tensely simultaneous tendencies toward freedom and necessity. The poem closes with a metaphor marrying scientific inquiry to the total transformation of social substrate. The "new" economy must be "anatomized"; paradoxically, the process of dissection ushers in a new body politic. Our transformative explorations, it turns out, have ignited the creative destruction of the economic order.

In the beginning of "'Further than'—," the body and its excrescences provide the very pigment for the natural images that open out onto mathematical and spatial totalities. The final image suggests a similarly porous relationship between body and world; the economy, too, has an anatomy whose disarticulation is the first step in its reconstitution. The body of this "new"

economy rises from the fallen flesh of living labor, tethered no longer to the ceaseless devaluations of dead labor. Zukofsky, with quiet militancy, emplaces his own body in the currents of world-making. The poem's final moments screen the recognizably modernist invocation of "the new," and the poet arrives at a new beginning of history by the end of his ablutions. This is not to say that he was previously outside of its grasp; indeed, he was always the subject of his present. However, the specificity of the *revolutionary* modernist periodization is that it not only imagines the present as a break with the past but the future—that "further than"—as a break from the present.

Mediation and Agency: The Subject Strains

By now it should be clear that Zukofsky's Objectivism coils not only to the objects but also, crucially, to the subjects of capitalism. The poems we have been exploring feature subjects who are mediated to and by themselves and others, or, to speak Althusser in the language of Adorno, are subjects determined, in the last instance, by objects. I want to distinguish my discussion of the process by which these subjects comprehend their subjection from what Jameson has noted as the tendency of ideologues of modernism: to construct taxonomies of modernism around "categories of consciousness." He argues that "the narrative of modernity cannot be organized around categories of subjectivity; consciousness and subjectivity are unrepresentable; only situations of modernity can be narrated,"[13] By some contrast, this study of Objectivist self-reflexivity is less interested in the ideational construction of a feelingful "consciousness" imputed by critics than it is in the constitution of a subject shaped dialectically in the binding play between agency and determination. Allow the tenth (and most compressed) poem from *Anew*, first published in 1938, to elaborate such a dialectic, in which the subject confronts herself not simply as a consciousness-effect of crumbling exterior stimuli but rather as an communicating vessel sharing languages thickened by history, and never quite all her own.

> What are these songs
> straining at sense—
> you the consequence?[14]

The poem oscillates between aleatory interrogation and teleological certitude, and in doing so offers us a person ("you") both produced by, and producing, language, which is here rendered poetically as "songs." The interrogative reflects this flux of determination and agency; the question form of the

poem indirectly posits a questioner-subject rendered legible only by dint of its provisional, searching engagements with the world. Likewise, the "songs" attain to their "sense" through their capacity to shape the very subject they require for admission into discursive life. An em dash simultaneously cleaves and joins song and person, an indexical trace of how mediation separates as it sutures. The subject ("you") does not precede the "songs" but rather becomes the active prism of the world it surveys.

This dynamic articulation of the subject goes some ways toward solving many of the key questions that preoccupied modernists; the poem's corrosion of the antinomy between the individual and a world of collectives offers a prophetic reply to Stevens's fissured portrait of the singer and "ourselves" in "The Idea of Order at Key West." As in "To my wash-stand," Zukofsky is less interested in such recalcitrant oppositions than he is the processes through which the singular comes to know, and find common cause with, the multiple. Mediation as a structuring aesthetic principle works in homeopathic fashion against the affects and structures of alienation that are so generative for the early-twentieth-century imagination. A subject alive to itself as a subject and object of history confronts daily the structural fact that it is as much separated from the objects that populate its present as it is bound and determined by them; to cut is to truss. While still dominant taxonomies of modernism reproduce the often unhelpful binaries of "high" modernist alienation and impersonality and "low" modernist sentiment, Zukofsky's short poems superannuate critical categories organized primarily around the superimposition of a specific form on an (often imputed) affect, subjectivity, or consciousness. Instead we discover a modernism whose fundamental characteristic is not that it reveals something of an imagined interiority but rather that it possesses a formal commitment to etching the contours of the process by which the subject comes to find itself in possession of its current consciousness.

Earlier versions of "What are these songs" make explicit this emphasis; written between? "straining at sense" and "you the consequence" we find in Zukofsky's archive "Here were three / training / let you."[15] Given the familial themes in several of *Anew*'s other poems, the threesome most likely refers to the parental dyad plus child. Zukofsky's final version palimpsests the specificity of the domestic scene of subjection beneath a broader treatment of subjectivity and aesthetics. Nevertheless, the draft lines underscore the ways in which the familial theater hosts ideological reproductions shot through with micropower and compressed sociality. "Training" suggests, by

turns, the cultivation of a child, regimes of work, and/or animal servitude. Fascinatingly, the *OED* also offers a definition of "train": "to strain the sense of," or to falsify through rhetorical turns. Beguilingly similar enough to Zukofsky's final version ("straining at sense"), one suspects the *OED* as source text—a tempting proof of our theory that Zukofsky is keen to explore the ways in which the long histories of language arrive to us, who are youthful by contrast, to be wielded and shaped. In any case, the restoration of the middle lines reminds us that the subject of language, its "consequence," is also the subject of the family. The hortative subjective ("let") insists that before the subject legislates freely, s/he acts on permissions granted by parental authority. Interestingly, however, "training" refers to all the family members; even the parents find themselves compelled, their comportments generated by the scene. The question posed by this poem can only be answered by subjects already having come to consciousness of themselves aspirating the windpipes of history, of ideology, and of language. The answer is found, to borrow a perhaps too melancholic sentiment from Sol Funaroff, on "shores of freedom" that Zukofsky "never knew."[16]

What the Nimbus of Revolutionary Consciousness Might Look Like

What is the perceptual life of the subject en route to such future climes? 1938 brings an answer in the form of poem "29" in *Anew*. Zukofsky footnotes this poem as follows, and the poem is best read in the light of these allusions cast by these ancillary explanations. The first footnote is from Dante's *Paradiso*, canto 24, in which St. Peter appears to Dante in the eighth sphere of heaven, alternatively so-called the sphere of the Fixed Stars or the sphere of the Church Triumphant. In this sphere, which is also that of Dante's natal astrological sign, Gemini, apostles dance and dialogue with Dante, whose Beatrice now reflects upon the previous spheres and on the Earth entire. Zukofsky leaves the passage untranslated:

> . . . e quelle anime liete
> si fero spere sopra fissi poli,
> fiammando forte a guisa comete
>
> cosi quelle carole diffente-
> mente danzando, della sua ricchezza
> mi si facean stimar, veloci e lente.
> PARADISO, XXIV, 10-12, 16-18[17]

Below, find an English translation for the less polyglot contemporary, including an interceding stanza excised by Zukofsky:

> . . . and those blissful souls,
> flaming as bright as comets, formed themselves
> into a sphere revolving on fixed poles.
>
> As the wheels within a clockwork synchronize
> so that the innermost, when looked at closely
> seems to be standing, while the outermost flies;
>
> just so those rings of dancers whirled to show
> and let me understand their state of bliss,
> all joining in the round, some fast, some slow.[18]

The second footnote to this poem quotes Marx from *Capital*, chapter 3 on Money, section 2a, "The Metamorphosis of Commodities":[19]

> It is a contradiction to say that a body is continually falling towards another and is at the same time continually flying away from it. The ellipse is a trajectory which, while allowing this contradiction to subsist, at the same time solves it. . . .
>
> The bodily substance of gold counts only as the embodiment of value. . . . In its reality, therefore, it is exchange-value. Its use-value manifests itself solely in the ideal form, in the series of expressions of relative value, in which it enters into relation with the contraposing commodities as the complex of its real use forms. These antagonistic forms of commodities are the real forms in which the process of their exchange has its movement and its being.
>
> DAS KAPITAL, Metamorphosis of Commodities[20]

The poem itself then offers a fierce compression of these preceding ur-texts:

29

Glad they were there
Falling away
Flying not to
Lose sight of it
Not going far
In angles out
Of ovals of
Dances filled up
The field the green

With light above
With the one hand
In the other.[21]

"29" depicts the illumination of a field by the constellation Gemini, whose astrological image is that of a pair of twins holding hands. The poem is speculatively written from the *other side* of the ascension to revolutionary consciousness (for Dante, to the realm of the Church Triumphant), in which the tongues of transformative ecstasy and political economy find themselves in groove. The work of the visionary complements that of the political economist. Through a twinning of these once opposed perspectives, the poem writes from a future time in which transcendence is reconciled with that at first seemingly dour form of analysis that takes the commodity as its object of study. Where Dante will submit to the saints' interrogations to test his religious knowledge and faith, Zukofsky will draw on the heuristics of Marxism to answer questions of this world.

The illuminated, redeemed souls that compose the constellation remain fixed in position (in Dante, "spheres upon poles/outflaming mightily"; in Zukofsky, "Falling away/Flying not to/. . . Not going far/In angles out") while also enjoying exultant forms of self-expression (in Dante, "carols with their differing whirl"; in Zukofsky, "dances"). Merging freedom with necessity, the revolutionary is both deathless and precise, an angel with angles. The poem's form follows the stars' dance between freedom and necessity. A deixis hinges almost every enjambment, pointing and gesturing freely to a world beyond, or after, the poem. The discipline of fixed meter offers a counterpoint to this freedom: every line possesses exactly four syllables. Appropriately hewing to the most popular and simplest of time signatures (4/4 or, aptly, "common" time), the stanzas render the greatest possible freedom in the strictest possible form. Like Dante's redeemed souls, the poem itself possesses an elliptical expressivity, gesturing deictically while remaining true to a single formal rule.

There is no absolute liberation from the spaces of history. Instead, the recognition and acceptance of the subject's emplacement and of its fixedness by the steering tethers of the extant world frees up truly illuminating, collectively articulated expressivity in which "dances filled up/The field the green/with light above." The constellation that illuminates the "field" is certainly an empirically existing arrangement of stars, but it is perceived and comprehended in and through the manmade figurative abstraction of the

astrological sign. In this way, we perceive the systems we navigate through the difficult path of rising from the abstractions of our collective figurative codes to the concrecities of our environments.

Marx's metaphor of the ellipse captures how figurative abstractions are necessary to the conceptual acquisition of contradiction. In Zukofsky's citation, "the ellipse is a trajectory that, while allowing this contradiction to subsist, at the same time solves it," the ellipse offers a formal corollary to the image of the redeemed souls' fixedness and freedom; like the souls, the ellipse holds together in mutually constitutive tension once irreconcilable contradictions. Zukofsky excerpts this passage from Marx's argument that the money form developed as an effect of the hard contradiction between use and exchange value located in the heart of the commodity. The money form ("gold" in Zukofsky's poem) is the mediation that contradiction requires for its maintenance; without it, the commodity cannot make its "salto mortales"—its deathly jump, as Marx would have it—from one form, use value, to another, exchange value.

Marx therefore supplements Dante in the poem's allusive reach; the post-revolutionary subject hosts happily the permanent tension between free agency and its emplacement within the spaces of history. This acceptation, Zukofsky's invocation of Marx suggests, is the result of a recognition and reading of the commodity form's similarly structured elemental oppositions. A successful confrontation with the commodity's veiled contradictions neutralizes mediation's obfuscatory functions and opens up the liberation of mediation's heuristic properties as an analytic through which the whole historical atmosphere might be asymptotically comprehended—and filled with dances.

"Mantis," or, The Tenacious Residuum of the Symbolic in the Shadow of the Commodity

"Mantis," written in 1934 and collected in the 1941 volume *55 Poems*, is one of Zukofsky's most formally archaic works. Briefly summarized, the poem charts in sestina form the shared paths of collective and individual advance from social timidity to revolutionary liberation. In doing so, it limns the boundary between a seemingly unmodernist commitment to a narrativistic historical telos and a more recognizably modernist tendency to excavate and revivify precapitalist poetic forms. Other critics have explored in detail the poem as a response to the practices of a transatlantic surrealist coterie, as emblematic of a certain moment of revolutionary, and as an ex-

ample of the avant-garde battle against the tyrannical effects of reification upon acts of radical representation.[22] All of these extremely useful preceding analyses will be in play during the discussion that follows; our task here, however, is the exploration of how Zukofsky cautiously reinstates the symbol as an aesthetic mediation deeply valuable to transformative thinking. The modernist trepidation toward the symbol is informed, in part, by a disdain for figurations whose referential adequations conjure only enervated historical content; recall, for example, Niedecker's asymbolic, neologic taxonomies of consciousness, or the nonreferential economies of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*. In "Mantis," symbolic practice is tested in the fires of this chariness. From these fires it emerges as a medium for the reconciliation of histories of struggle whose connections have been shattered and made distant to one another by periodizations that compartmentalize and separate past, present, and future. Indeed, "Mantis" redeems the symbol as a mediation that bridges actors and events, and the present with the future. The poem opens with an address to a "praying mantis" in the subway, and the encounter occasions in the speaker simultaneous feelings of guilt, revulsion, and fear:

> Mantis! praying mantis! since your wings' leaves
> And your terrified eyes, pins, bright, black and poor
> Beg—"Look, take it up" (thoughts' torsion)! "save it"
> I who can't bear to look, cannot touch,—You—
> You can—but no one sees you steadying lost
> In the cars' drafts on the lit subway stone.[23]

The mantis is the form of a content whose historical contours the poem embarks upon revealing. The insect is not a *direct* symbol of the "poor." Rather, the mantis resides at the frontier of representational practice, the site at which the poet must confront the impossibility of directly presenting to us the potentiations of revolutionary energy not yet fully birthed into discursive life. The homophonic doubling of the "praying mantis" (preying/praying) discloses the aesthetic stakes of symbolic mediation. On the one hand, the symbol does some violence to what it transports, refracting and molesting some ever-receding original content; on the other hand, it clears a path toward the apprehension of that very content. After congress with the mantis-mediation, the poet explores the complex political vectors that structure the self, too, as one more embodiment of history and its contents. The poet admits to a shrinking fear of his own inadequacy to the task of

"saving" the mantis, and in doing so, acknowledges and demurs that other long-standing, religious mediation: the transcendental messianic.

Here, the poet's task is not to rescue but to give form to the previously inexpressible and hidden. That form, if it is to function in the service of a revelatory poetics, must necessarily be birthed out of the knowledge that the poet's seeming singularity garrisons a host of sometimes contradictory feelings and forces. Four lines precede the first and only use of "I" as a denotation of the speaker, an "I" that is the consequence both temporally and logically ("since") of the gaze of the mantis, whose "black and poor" "eyes" mark the inequalities of race and class. The poet faces the psychic enervations of fear, revulsion, and defeatism that emerge from his meeting with the fragile oppositions of the mantis and all that it represents. From this, he discovers the inverse of his own fear: the recognition of the emancipatory power in that working class for whom he will not claim to speak. A Dickensonian "You—you can—" embarks on a poetics that is less about eschatology than it is about the possibility of collective action. Hewing to the pattern we have been tracing throughout the short poems, the speaker-poet's critical self-reflection focuses a similarly analytical eye on the practice of commodity exchange. A stanza later, we find Zukofsky considering the consciousness of a "newsboy" who sells his eponymous commodity amid the subway travelers:

> Even the newsboy who now sees knows it
> No use, papers make money, makes stone, stone,
> Banks, "it is harmless," he says moving on—You?
> Where will he put *you*? There are no safe leaves
> To put you back in here, here's news! too poor
> Like all the separate poor to save the lost.[24]

Commodity exchange obscures use value ("No use") as the money form replaces labor as the apparent genesis of value. Note the anadiplosis of the stanza's second line; "stone"'s repetition formally embodies its position as both the subject and object of exchange. "Money," on the other hand, presents as emphatically singular, its form of appearance drawn from the imperative of accumulation for accumulation's sake, where money itself is the sole telos. The singularity of money and the redoubling of the stones recalls Marx's equation for exchange in the service of use value, C-M-C (commodity—money—commodity). The companion formula of exchange for exchange value is also present, (M-C-M); in this case, the final product of the exchange

is finance capital itself, or "banks." The bank's physical solidity successfully disappears the money-form's arbitrary and fluctuating valuation, which is always in danger, especially in moments of economic crisis, of becoming visible.

The newsboy "sees" and "knows" about the mantis, just as he sees and knows about the ceaseless process of circulation and commodity exchange during which "papers make money, makes stone, stone,/Banks," each object substituted ceaselessly by its equivalent. This process appears "harmless" to a newsboy who does not grasp how this seemingly natural system of exchange violently effaces the actions of actual producers with those of sorcerer objects that "make" new objects by virtue of nothing but abstract equivalence. The newsboy's totalization relies crucially, and tragically, on his self-extraction from the very process that could not proceed without him. In "To my wash-stand" we witnessed how the poet's self-reflection was the interior twin of the recognition of the transformative power of those from whom he is separated by domestic walls and privatized spaces. In this later stanza, the "newsboy"'s failure to grasp the scene provides a less revelatory lesson for the poet. Mere knowledge of the mediations of the commodity, it seems, cannot produce a similarly revolutionary vision; that particular dialectical leap requires the subject to emplace itself as one of, and in relation to, the structures of race and class, embodied here in the "black" and "poor" mantis, that patrol access to the larger social body.

Emboldened by a thorough survey of the calculus of exchange, the poet returns to make public his private self-reflection, this time confessing his fears in the interest that his self-exposure will alight in the working class a similar confrontation of their own self-shackling fears:

> Don't light on my chest, mantis! do—you're lost,
> Let the poor laugh at my fright, then see it:
> My shame and theirs, you whom old Europe's poor
> Call spectre, strawberry, by turns; a stone—
> You point—they say—you lead lost children—leaves
> Close in the paths men leave, saved, safe with you.[25]

The poet confesses once again his fear of the mantis. He submits himself to a public shaming, only to reveal that he and the "poor" share common ownership of the contradictory amalgam of pathos and terror symbolized by the mantis. The poet's fear becomes an open, municipal mediation of the poor's equally private apprehensions. Uneven developments combine as kindling

as we witness the potentially explosive partnering of the communist traditions of "old Europe's poor" and the emergent energies dammed within a thoroughly proletarianized American underclass. "Old Europe's poor" also possess both fear and desire for the historical break the mantis commands. They perceive it both as the "spectre" that also haunted Marx's Europe in *The Communist Manifesto*, and the possibility of a post-scarcity surfeit of delicate preserves, significantly "strawberry," or red, in hue. "Old Europe's poor" appears at first a curious invocation in the subway setting so in debt to regimes of modernization. However, the "poor" on the New York subway would certainly be comprised, in part, of workers hailing from the second wave of European immigration and/or their immediate descendants; in naming this presence, Zukofsky documents the persistence of radical political traditions fostered in the ruins of the European ancien régime. The residual is the cocoon of the emergent; such sharp historical adjacencies etch out a space for ideas of negation and resistance. It may not be "news," but it appears that the old order has bled out subjects poised to share Zukofsky's fearful enthusiasm for transformation.

The penultimate stanza sutures together this retrieval of seemingly residual historical formations with the animation of symbols ferrying the emergence of revolutionary consciousness:

> Killed by thorns (once men), who now will save you
> Mantis? what male love bring a fly, be lost
> Within your mouth, prophetess, harmless to leaves
> And hands, faked flower,—the myth is: dead, bones, it
> Was assembled, apes wing in wind: On stone,
> Mantis, you will die, touch, beg, of the poor.[26]

As critics have observed, Zukofsky encountered the "myth" of the mantis in Roger Caillois's essay "Le Mante religieuse," published in the French Surrealist journal *Minotaur*.[27] In this essay, Caillois explores the creation myths of certain Central African tribes, in which the mantis is, by turns, constructed by the moon's old shoe, charged with providing food to beggars, devoured and vomited alive by a god, and killed by horns of human provenance only to be resurrected, its bones re"assembled."[28] The poem also draws on the mantis's reproductive practices, the popular version of which makes universal the relatively rare occasion when the female decapitates the male after copulation.

In many respects, the mantis appropriates capital's accumulative strate-

gies. The mantis's appetitive reproduction shares capital's capacities for creative destruction. It also shares capital's structural inclination to substitute a mythical narrative of production, wherein wealth emerges autochthonously from the sea foam of capital itself ("it/Was assembled"), for the material history of labor's efforts. These similarities are far from coincidental; indeed, the mantis symbolically negates the structural tendencies of capital through seizing their very inner workings. Much like the subject who transcodes an analysis of the commodity form as a bad mediation into a libratory recognition of itself as one more mediation of the object world it surveys, the mantis revalences the content of capitalism's obfuscatory and accumulative strategies, transforming its myths of self-reproduction into the new modes of objective and subjective freedom unleashed in the envoi:

> Fly, mantis, on the poor, arise like leaves
> The armies of the poor, strength: stone on stone
> And build the new world in your eyes, Save it![29]

The "armies of the poor," recall, also appear in *"A"*—8 and in *New Masses*' "March Comrades."[30] "Mantis" writes the prehistory of their active duty in the pages of a mass-revolutionary organ. It is almost as if Zukofsky were planning for their dissemination in such a venue. When the newsboy calls out "here's news" in the third stanza, he is, in reality selling fungible iterations of dead labor. By some contrast, the final stanza's actors will appear four years later in *New Masses*, a newspaper that promoted the "new" not as a neutered recency but as the transformation of the social order into a "new world." Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, the intervening mediation of the mantis symbol, like that of the washstand, furnishes the conditions for a *direct* address to the working class. What will become propaganda here is anything but the cynical condescension of an artistic elite; rather, it is the complex offspring of a poetic process that passes through the stages of self-admonishment and inquiry to arrive finally at a sensitive adequation between poet and public.

We began our discussion of "Mantis" by noting that the poem turns on the use of the symbol, that very literary device whose superannuation the first-generation modernists heralded. For example, how different is "Mantis," in form and content, from that other far more famous subway poem, Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," published over two decades and a Depression prior?

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.[31]

Pound's famous gloss of this poem emphasizes that the poem is an imagistic "equation" of his encounter in the subway with "a beautiful child's face, then another beautiful woman. . . . In a poem of this sort, one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."[32] Putting aside the grammatical curio that retroactively installs the "woman" as "another" iteration of a "child," Pound's methodological meditations reveal that the transition between first- and second-generation modernism involves nothing less than the total dialectical reversal of the relationship between the data of perceptual life and its appearance as an aesthetic mediation. Pound's poem—like his account of its production—strains to resolve social alienation by way of an aesthetic turn. The perceiver disowns his libidinal cathexes to unavailable objects of desire (children, women) by submitting them to a seemingly impersonal aesthetic driven by a seemingly self-generating logic in which "a thing outward and objective *transforms itself*, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (emphasis added). The first-generation modernist identifies the chasm of mediation; to suture a parataxis inspired by this fissure, a semicolon hangs.

Zukofsky restores the subject to these aesthetic mediations of the social world. "Mantis" takes as its very point of departure this scene of the poet's engriddedness in a social matrix, and directs Imagism's libidinal charge into the desire for transformation symbolized by the mantis. The revolutionary potential of the mantis can only be activated when poet and proletariat engage in mutual mediation, and in doing so, surrender themselves together to the revolutionary process. "Mantis" endorses Pound's tenet that any image is but a capture shot indexing a larger process of "transformation." However, in place of a self-propelling process confined to the mystical realms of aesthetic autonomy, we find the persistence of a somewhat older form of mediation, the symbol. The deciphering of this symbol requires that its referential pedigree must be traced, its mediations exfoliated.

Conclusion: Three Maxims of Revolutionary Literacy

We have been tracing the Zukofsky era as a site for the acquisition and practice of revolutionary literacy. The syllabus of such a literacy traces a dia-

lectical arc, drawn in the following shape, with each concept pendent from the last.

This arc might be charted by the following maxims: *First: Where we find what appear to be fragmented forms and contents, we read instead absolute interdependence.* Radical modernism's signature strategy, parataxis, englyphs spatial and temporal combinations and unevennesses, and charts constellations of struggle and dispossession, from Marked Tree to Wisconsin to New York to Shanghai. Other unevennesses of other literary modernities await the reader alive to the ceaseless combinations of development and dedevelopment: austere anti-austerity postmodernisms; the replicant horror cinemas of late finance capital, screening purposeless migrations and subtractive aggregations.

Second: Permit unevenness to reveal a landscape quilted and policed by the defeatable tyranny of the commodity. To the interrogations of our literacy, Objectivism's commodities confess their secret squads of dead and decaying labor, pointing deictically to the work stoppages on Zukofsky's canzone shop floor. When the hermeneutic of unevenness subjects the commodity form to its tests, a poetic collage of multiple temporalities emerges where once there was only a narrative of values victoriously animated by consumption.

Third: Resocialize representation to find the subject, through language and labor, determined by and repairing an uneven, commodified world. Objectivism documents the objects of history in order to screen their conversion into the Mantis-subjects of history. Uneven developments scar these subjects; commodities entomb their labor and homogenize their desires. The lyric hangs in the balance at all times, irretrievable from its idealist transcendence of the world, yet renovated in calendars, choruses, and series to carry the voice of subjects objectified by historical circumstances not of their own choosing. The twentieth century's first global season of revolts leaves to such subjects an enduring legacy: "See sun, and think shadow."[33]

Appendix

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Political	Social	National	Economical	Modes of Production (includes physiography)	Cultural	Effect on American Design	Suggested Dates
I	From Europe to Democracy	Courts Merchants (Laborers (**(Slaves) Indentured Servants** - **Artisans**	England V.S. the other European Powers. Control of America and Relinquishment	Merchant Co. Individual adventurer Laborers (Hire)	Labor Handicraft	Religious - Renaissance - Heliocentric World - The Calculus	Tudor-Renaissance Continent's effect on England & England's on America **other countries** - Baroque	1608-1788
II	Factions of Democracy	Merchants **Peddlers** (Agriculturalists ((frontiersmen) **Slaves** Craftsmen-Laborers	England pits Europe v.s. U.S. & North v.s. South - Annexation and Consolidation	Commerce (Privateering) Plantation Crafts (Beg. of Division of Labor)	Inventions Handicraft	Eclecticism of Reason - Rocaille (Rococco) - Electromagnetic Induction (Faraday in England, Joseph Henry Rensselaer Cy., N.Y.) Ca. 1820. The Motor.	Sophisticated Stylization - The Provincial (Rural)	1789-1865
III	After the Civil War	Financiers Professions Men of Business Farmers-Workers	U.S.A. into a world power	Corporate Power *Large Scale Industry* Farming Division of Labor	Advent of the Machine **Handicraft**	Variegated "traditions" - Statistical Thinking - The Machine product	Machine product **and** Persistence of a tradition	1866-1900

Notes

Introduction

Epigraphs. Louis Zukofsky, "A" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 508. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 49.

1. Scholars of cultural poetics will recognize the concept of the "nexus" as developed by DuPlessis and Quartermain in their introduction to the edited volume *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics*. Here they acknowledge the very provisional and complex nature of the associations between those poets commonly associated with Objectivism. Nevertheless, they "affirm that these writers were indeed conjoined through a variety of personal, ideological, and literary historical links." See Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, ed., *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 2. The concept of the nexus encourages historical specificity whilst also remaining sensitive to the aleatory nature of many avant-garde and modernist groupings. Scholars of Zukofsky and his work will recall his later resistance to calcifying this nexus into yet another literary-academic institution. In 1969 he would comment that he preferred "objectivist" to "objectivism" (*Prepositions +*: *The Collected Critical Essays,* ed. Mark Scroggins [Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000], 171). I share Zukofsky's allergy to the flattening effects of institutionalization; in what follows, "Objectivism" will signal a convergence whose contours exceed what we perceive of as the intentions of any one of its members. To this end, the term "Objectivism" remains faithful to Zukofsky's suspicion of easy "isms" which avoid the complexities and contradictions present in any nucleus of authors. In a somewhat larger critical context, my use of "Objectivism" intervenes against retroactively installing a post–Cold War chariness of "isms" to a Depression-era political and aesthetic moment in which fidelity to radical projects was not yet pathologized.

2. This critical observation builds upon Andreas Huyssen's methodological breakthrough in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), which explores the dynamic imbrications of

high modernism and the popular—areas of cultural production commonly understood as antagonistic to one another.

3. Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), 25.

4. For an excellent review of the critical contours of the New Modernist Studies, see Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008): 737–48. Fredric Jameson's *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) marks the opening strains of the critical discussion of the relationship between Anglo-American high modernism and reactionary politics. More recent contributions to this conversation include Vincent Sherry's *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Charles Ferrall's *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The critical study of the historical convergence of fascism and modernism is beguilingly complex, so much so that it always seems to require a supplement. In 1995 and 1996, the field journal of the New Modernist Studies, *Modernism/modernity*, ran a two-part special series entitled "Fascism and Culture"; in 2003, the journal titled two issues "Eliot and Anti-Semitism: The Ongoing Debate." This book is surely indebted to the continuing critical interest and work in fascistic modernisms. However, it is important to note that the kinds of methodologies linking modernism and fascism are not simply portable to the equally vast world of connections between modernism and communism. For this reason I suggest that the aim of this project is not only an exploration of Objectivism, but an inquiry into the kinds of critical models necessary to study the relationship between modernism and the less widespread, but equally compelling, periodization of the twentieth century as one of transformative left utopianisms—what Alain Badiou has called a "Century of Revolutions" in *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

5. David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 629.

6. Lukács's "Realism in the Balance" famously diagnosed fragmentation as an aesthetic index of social remove and the subjective solipsism ensuing from such a remove. See *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), 1033–58. Scholars such as Peter Nicholls expand upon Lukács's critical framework by positioning it within the spatial and temporal configurations of modernity: "temporality is explored . . . as a discontinuous cultural memory conceived as the very matrix of the new modernism. . . . For many of the major figures of Anglo-American modernism, time was imaginatively experienced through the shock of 'exile' and cultural contrast" (*Modernisms: A Literary Guide* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005], 165). Jameson also takes up the question of modernism's positioning within the geographical topography of capitalist modernity in his well-known essay "Modernism and Imperialism," re-collected in *The Modernist Papers*, in which he posits that modernist fragmentation stylistically registers the dis-

locations and blindnesses of a world partitioned by imperialism. Alternatively, fragmentation has also been valenced as aesthetically aleatory, as in Hugh Kenner's description of Pound's "aesthetic of glimpses" (*The Pound Era* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971], 68), or as in Adorno's famous reading of Beckett's *Endgame* as an enactment of art's opposition to the "binding universality of objective reality," an opposition marked by the formal representation of an always already "fragmented subjectivity." See *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 328. More recently, Mark Wollaeger productively frustrates the critical binary inherited from the debates between Lukács and his opponents to argue that "the metaphoric substructures subtending modernist fragmentation provide an aesthetic alternative to the stifling social integration urged by propaganda, an alternative that need not be considered a surrender to subjectivism." See *Modernism, Media and Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 23. I offer these examples not to provide a history of the debates and discussions around modernist "fragmentation" but rather as a way of exploring how "fragmentation" is less of an empirical formal quality than it is a way of speaking about the political economy of modernist practice and ideology.

7. While the majority of this book is devoted to the 1930s writings of Objectivists, the treatment here of *"A"*—1 is a notable exception. It is commonplace in the historical imagination, as well as among bourgeois economists, to understand the great class struggles of the 1930s as reflexes of the financial crisis that began in 1929. *"A"*—1's attention to immiseration and labor agitation in the 1920s suggests a different periodization of resistance, one that antedates the literatures and protests of the Popular Front, the WPA, or even what has come to be called the Depression itself.

8. Louis Zukofsky, *"A"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 1. Subsequent references are to this edition.

9. As a matter of historical record: many poets within the Objectivist constellation began their writerly life in the 1920s. This historical context therefore encompasses Objectivism but not all of the works by individual writers within its ranks. For a subtle discussion of Objectivism's positioning within the politics of the 1930s, see Michael Heller's "Objectivists in the Thirties: Utopolyptic Moments," in DuPlessis and Quartermain, ed., *The Objectivist Nexus,* as well as Mark Scroggins, "The Revolutionary Word: Louis Zukofsky, New Masses, and Political Radicalism in the 1930s," in *Upper Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky*, ed. Mark Scroggins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 44–65.

10. See, for example Thomas A. Lyson and William W. Falk's edited collection *Forgotten Places: Uneven Development and the Loss of Opportunity in Rural America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), which provides a useful review of the literature on the various Depression-era regional under- and de-developments of rural sectors. As any casual reader of Steinbeck knows, climactic catastrophe married with economic crisis produced mass migrations out of rural areas in the 1930s. Addition-

ally, racial segregation prevented the kinds of collective worker's power that manifested itself in areas of greater urban concentration, creating a situation in which the progress of new industrial developments relied on a seemingly unmodern plantation-style racial hierarchy. James C. Cobb *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877–1984* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 150. Internationally we also find the intensification of combined and uneven development as a result of the capitalist crisis of the 1930s. Eric Hobsbawm explores the increased immiseration of the global periphery in *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991*: "For the first time the interests of the dependent and metropolitan economies clashed visibly, if only because the prices of primary products, on which the Third World depended, collapsed so much more dramatically than those of the manufactured goods they bought from the West. For the first time, colonialism and dependency became unacceptable even to those who had hitherto benefitted from it" (New York: Vintage Books, 1996, 213). Alongside this radicalized population of students and intellectuals were a mass of ordinary people; the slump thus "established contact between the politicized minorities and the common people of their countries" (ibid., 214). Hobsbawm traces the effects of the 1930s economic crisis throughout India, Latin America, the British Caribbean, Vietnam, and Malaya.

11. See Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997) for an authoritative and sweeping survey of the cultural production affiliated with these rapidly growing social and political entities. Also see Cary Nelson's work in both *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory (1910–1945)* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991) and *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Michael Szalay's *New Deal Modernism: Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) also provides a useful New Historicist account of the relationship between the Recovery Acts and the national understanding of authorship and art.

12. Those interested in studies more properly biographical should begin by seeking out the pathbreaking Man/Woman and Poet series from the New Poetry Foundation, whose titles include Carroll Terrell, ed., *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1979); Burton Hatlen, ed., *George Oppen: Man and Poet* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1981); and Jenny Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1996). Also see Scroggins's *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky* (Berkeley: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2007) and Peter Nicholls's *George Oppen and the Fate of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Essays from Bob Perelman, Charles Bernstein, and Norman Finkelstein, among others, in Stephen Paul Miller and Daniel Morris's edited volume *Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), offer beguiling meditations on the relationship between left

aesthetics and Jewish identity. As of this date, an authoritative biography of Niedecker awaits its author.

13. *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

14. Nicholls, *George Oppen and the Fate of Modernism*, 9.

15. This brief poem provides the opening lines for *"A"*—22. Written between 1970 and 1973, this text falls outside of this book's official period of inquiry, namely Objectivist works from the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. The poem was previously published on a postcard by Unicorn Press of Santa Barbara in 1970, further lending it its status as a work discrete unto itself. I treat it here in the context of the preceding discussion of Objectivism's historical imagination. What I offer here is not a close reading of this poem, such as Peter Quartermain and Michelle Leggott have done with exhaustive subtlety, but a brief excursus on the poem as a meditation on periodization and the horizon of the future. My analysis is greatly indebted to Quartermain's archival research, and my conclusions regarding the poem's overarching mien enhance the materialist contours of Quartermain's assessment of the work as an expression of the fact that "not only is all history simultaneous, or contemporaneous, then, but in its onomatopoeic aspect language is essentially polyglot—a simultaneity of languages." See *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 111.

16. Ibid.

17. See, for example, Pascal Casanova, *The Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), or Franco Morretti's *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez* (London: Verso, 1996).

18. See, for example, Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002); Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jahan Ramazani, "Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity," *Modernism/Modernity* 13 (2006): 445–64; Susan Stanford Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies," in *Modernism*, Vol. 1, ed. Astradur Eysteinsson and Vivial Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2007), 35–52; Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

19. See Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 68–78, and Perry Anderson, *Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), 3.

20. See Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 317–34.

21. Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5. However, he also notes that "a weakness of a theory of uneven development is that it underestimates the traffic in manifestos that enabled these manifestos to produce effects elsewhere, whether in the center of modernization such as England and the United States or in barely modernized nations such as China. . . . The theory of uneven development thus explains well the first emergence of radical or avant-garde modernism, but not the often unpredictable impact and reactions this modernism provoked once it was transported beyond its origin through translations, travels, and adaptations" (6). For Puchner, uneven development as a concept possesses the power to explain the origins of an avant-garde but lacks the dynamism to trace the circulation of these avant-gardes as they remerge and transform in various national contexts. I share Puchner's diagnosis of the limits of uneven development as an analytic; to remedy its shortcomings, I propose a model of *combined* and uneven development.

22. Dipesh Chakrabarty offers a useful discussion of the ways in which "uneven development" has nefariously dovetailed with "stagist" accounts of world historical development, and in doing so, has enabled the ideological elision of archaic and subaltern. *Provincializing Europe: Poscolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 12. What I am arguing, by contrast, is that capitalism itself *produces* unevenness. Unevenness does not provide a window to the past but rather provides a spatial index of capitalism's contradictory needs and tendencies in the present.

23. Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 1999), 416.

24. Interestingly, Harvey notes that his use of the term *fix* is itself metaphorical. It figuratively embodies the contradictory nature of capitalist spatial expansion: it is necessary but also contributory to the eventual deepening of an inevitable, unfixable crisis. It seems that critical geography draws willingly on the tools of literary study in its accounts of contradiction; I am proposing here an exchange in kind. See David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (London: Verso, 2006).

25. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 109. Later, in *Capital,* Vol. 1, uneven development, while not directly named as such, describes the very processes of "so-called primitive accumulation;" in this conception, uneven development refers to effects registered *spatially*, as capital's increasingly concentrated character is the negative image of the immiseration and expropriation of the peasantry.

26. For example, C. L. R. James, Middle Eastern and South Asian revolutionaries present at the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East of 1920, and Antonio Gramsci (esp. in his formulation of the concept of "passive revolution"), among others.

27. Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution,* trans. Max Eastman (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1961), 28.

28. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. Donal Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 355.

29. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 228–29.

30. *Capital,* Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes. (London: Penguin, 1992), 160–61.

31. *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 11.

32. See, for example, Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics* and "Parataxis in Basil Bunting and Louis Zukofsky," *The Durham University Journal* (1995): 54–70; the spatialized genealogies of Ron Silliman's anthology *In the American Tree* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 2001); Bob Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); the penultimate chapter in Mark Scroggins, *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998); Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003); and the embedded literary histories of *The Grand Piano* series.

33. See Bill Brown's *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), where Zukofsky is diagnosed as possessing a residual metaphysics of labor, in which "the idea of the thing seems to lie elsewhere—in some imagined place of origin, whether in the worker's mind (and only *then* in the art of manufacture), or in, say, the mind of God" (emphasis original) (1). Soon thereafter, Zukofsky appears as a touchstone in an arc of modernism whose works of art "attain to the status of a thing" (3).

34. Charles Altieri offers us an account of Objectivism that replaces political economy with ethical aestheticism: "Objectivism, then, is not merely attention to objects: it entails the construction of aesthetic objects in such a way that the conditions of desire are themselves dramatized and forced to take responsibility for their actions." See "The Objectivist Tradition," *Chicago Review* 30, no. 3 (1979): 12.

35. *Prepositions* +, 12.

36. Fredric Jameson's introduction to *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) offers a useful survey. See esp. 39–58.

Chapter One. Zukofsky: The Political Economy of Revolutionary Modernism

1. See, for example, the recent work of Perry Anderson, Brent Hayes Edwards, Fredric Jameson, Neil Larsen, Franco Moretti, Masha Salazkina, Roberto Schwarz, and Susan Stanford Friedman.

2. Neil Smith's *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008) remains the authoritative account of the concept. For a political history of the theory of combined and uneven development,

see Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development* (London: Verso, 1981).

3. Louis Zukofsky, *"A"*—8 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 48-49.

4. See Mark McMorris, "Postcolonial *'A'*? Empire and Nation in Louis Zukofsky's American Movements, A—14-A—17," *Xcp: Cross-Cultural Poetics* (2001): 11-22, for a nuanced argument that later Zukofsky, in *"A"*—14 through *"A"*—17, seeks to "integrate the particulars of a disintegrating national and international situation in to the total life of his poem." Despite the retention of the loose idea of "fragmentation" (which he later complicates into a "disintegrating hegemony"), McMorris's essay is remarkable in its energetic and labile readings, which, like this book, bring together Zukofsky's treatment of both transnational and intranational spaces (12, 21).

5. Theodor Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, *Notes to Literature,* Vol. 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 136.

6. Ibid.

7. Quartermain, "Parataxis," 54.

8. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Cultural Parataxis and Transnational Landscapes of Reading: Toward a Locational Modernist Studies," in *Modernism*, ed. Vivian Liska and Astradur Eysteinsson (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 37.

9. Ibid.

10. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 101.

11. Ibid., 102.

12. Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions* +: *The Collected Critical Essays,* ed. Mark Scroggins (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 12.

13. Theodor Adorno, *Prisms,* trans. Sam and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 142.

14. Ibid.

15. Zukofsky, *"A"*—6, 32.

16. Zukofsky, *Prepositions* +, 13.

17. A *Time* article contemporaneous with Zukofsky's writing of *"A"*—6 notes that the chief U.S. corporation "hardest hit" by the tariff was International Paper. With its orders with Russian concerns canceled, International Paper ceased to be internationally competitive ("The Tarriff: Pulpwood Embargo," *Time*, August 4, 1930).

18. Zukofsky, *"A"*—6, 32-33.

19. David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 1999), 427-28.

20. Zukofsky, *"A"*—8, 47.

21. Henri Poincaré, *Science and Hypothesis*, trans. W. J. Greenstreet (New York: Dover, 1952), 172-73.

22. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 524.

23. Zukofsky, *"A"*—8, 70.

24. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1918), 457.

25. Ibid.

26. Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes. (London: Penguin, 1992), 197.

27. Adams, *Education*, 436–49.

28. Ibid., 439.

29. Zukofsky, *"A"*—8, 45–46.

30. Ibid., 35.

31. Zukofsky, *"A"*—8, 70.

32. Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas's website *Z-site: A Companion to the Works of Louis Zukofsky* (www.z-site.net/, accessed Apr. 22, 2010) is, as usual, very helpful here, reminding us that Jeffers built and worked in a stone tower at Carmel, and his "enormously popular" work was often compared to the Greek tragedians.

33. Zukofsky, *"A"*—8, 92–93.

34. Ibid., 93.

35. Ibid., 94–95.

36. Ibid.

37. For an excellent discussion of the import of the ideogram on Poundian form and ideology, see Josephine Park, *Appartitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics* (New York: Oxford, 2008), especially the Introduction and chap. 1, "Cathay to Confucius."

38. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. Donal Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 65.

39. Zukofsky, *"A"*—8, 99.

40. Zukofsky wrote to W. C. Williams of this film, and its impact on the writing of *"A"*: "I now see that I don't know what I'm at, but after this evening with Amkino [American distributor of *Shanghai Document*] I can't help but know that I will know what I am at. . . . I mean for God's sake don't miss these Amkino films." See Barry Ahearn, ed., *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 19. The *New York Times* reviewer, who, like Zukofsky, viewed the film at the Cameo Theatre in Manhattan, begrudgingly praised its form, if not its content: "But as long as one can ignore the propaganda, there is a good deal of Shanghai's activities set forth with imaginative camera work." See Mourdant Hall, "Review of 'A Shanghai Document,'" *New York Times* October 16, 1928. For an extensive discussion of the Zukofsky's formal intake of Soviet Cinema, see David Kadlec, "Early Soviet Cinema and American Poetry," *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 2 (2004): 299–331, esp. 309–12.

41. Graham Roberts, *Forward Soviet: History and Non-fiction Film in the USSR* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 82.

42. Chris Beyers's account of Zukofsky's enduring use of Kentucky as a poetic site fascinates, as does his ambitious claim that Zukofsky remained a left modernist

throughout his life work. While this essay parts ways with Beyers's somewhat unsubtle characterizations of "Marxism," it certainly finds common cause with his heuristic, which weaves *"A"*'s Vietnam, eastern Kentucky, and Yiddish-speaking New York in solidaristic webs. See Chris Beyers, "Louis Zukofsky in Kentucky in History," *College Literature* 30, no. 4 (2003): 71–88.

43. See Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory (1910–1945)* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991) and *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

44. Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 324–25.

45. Ibid., 325.

46. Ibid., 325–26.

47. Ibid., 322.

48. Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 44–45.

49. See Kenneth Sherwood's Introduction to Louis Zukofsky, *A Useful Art: Essays and Radio Scripts on American Design*, ed. Kenneth Sherwood (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003) for a detailed overview of Zukofsky's WPA work.

50. Zukofsky, *"A"*—8, 96.

51. Ibid., 97.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 97–98.

54. Barry Ahearn, "Zukofsky, Marxism and American Handicraft," *Upper Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky*, ed. Mark Scroggins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 84.

55. Louis Zukofsky, "Outline for Book on American Arts Design" (Louis Zukofsky Collection, Ts. Box 14, Folder 7, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin).

56. As Zukofsky notes in one of his radio broadcasts. See Sherwood, *A Useful Art*, 168.

57. Willilam Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume I: 1909–1929*, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), 217.

58. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 104.

59. David Harvey, *Spaces of Neoliberalization*: *Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004), 83.

60. Ibid., 109.

61. We might imagine here that a version of Anderson's ancien régime/bourgeoisie

dyad finds its American compliment in the fusion of the colonial patrician class and emerging industrialists.

62. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 40.

63. V. I. Lenin, "The Handicraft Census of 1845–95 in Perm Gubernia and General Problems of the 'Handicraft Industry,'" *Collected Works,* Vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 367, 374.

64. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 307.

Chapter Two. Oppen: Cinematic Capitalism

Epigraphs. Burton Hatlen, ed., *George Oppen: Man and Poet* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1981), 40. George Oppen, *The Selected Letters of George Oppen,* ed., Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 55.

1. Alan Golding's article "Oppen's Serial Poems" in *The Objectivist Nexus* contains a useful discussion of Oppen's exclusion from some of the most influential histories of literary modernism: Michael Bernstein's *Tale of the Tribe*; Roy Harvey Pearce's *The Continuity of American Poetry*; James Miller's *The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction*. See Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, ed., *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 84–107. Critics who read the *Series* as within the Imagist tradition constellate in Burton Hatlen's important edited volume *George Oppen: Man and Poet* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1981). This essay takes as one of its points of departure a dissenting voice from that work, that of Marjorie Perloff, whose essay "'The Shaper of the Lines': Oppen and the Metric of Difference" represents an alternative view; she argues that *Discrete Series*, with its emphasis on constructed form, is a radical break from previous Imagist forms and concerns. I contend that both positions are, in a sense, correct. Oppen's work does return, as a conscious anachronism, to the work of the early Imagists. And out of the political and poetic desires of Imagism, *Discrete Series* does forge a specifically Objectivist poetics that sublates the forms of that earlier avant-garde. See Hatlen, *Oppen*, 215–29.

2. I refer to reification in its Lukácian, rather than its Heideggerian, sense. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács elaborates how reification is not simply a matter of misleading or false appearances, nor is it a synonym for anomie. Rather, reification, like the commodity fetish, is a structuring logic, specific to the capitalist mode of production, that characterizes all object and social relations governed by commodity exchange. György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971); see the chapter "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," 83–222, esp. 83–110.

3. Mary Oppen, *Meaning a Life: An Autobiography* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1978), 89.

4. George Oppen, *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 140.

5. In its emphasis on capitalism's geographies, *Discrete Series* proleptically enacts the strategy Jameson proposes we adopt toward the unrepresentable totality of late capitalism: "cognitive mapping." Jameson explains that "this is exactly what the cognitive map is called upon to do in the narrower framework of daily life in the physical city: to enable a representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole." See *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 51.

6. This chapter might be read usefully alongside Rocco Marinaccio's essay, which elaborates the ways in which *Discrete Series* emerged from the Oppens' experience of cross-America travel and the "Thirties Road Narrative." While Marinaccio's critical concerns do not share our geographical focus, ranging instead around the complex relationship of Oppen as avant-gardist to the American proletariat and its poetry, his discussions offer a biographically informed account of how Oppen worked to reconcile his petit bourgeois class location and his fidelity to total social emancipation. See Rocco Marinaccio, "George Oppen's "'I've Seen America' Book': *Discrete Series* and the Thirties Road Narrative," *American Literature* 74, no. 3 (2002): 539–69.

7. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. Donal Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 320.

8. Ibid., 363.

9. See, esp., chap. 5, "Contradictory Space," of Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 292–352.

10. Hatlen, *Oppen*, 40.

11. George Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Michael Davidson (New York: New Directions Books, 2002), 5.

12. Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions* +: *The Collected Critical Essays,* ed. Mark Scroggins (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 13.

13. Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 24.

14. Eliot Weinberger, Preface to Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, xii.

15. Ron Silliman, "The Shipwreckof the Singular: The Evolution of the Sentence in George Oppen's Verse," *Temblor* 5 (1987): 117.

16. See Joseph M. Conte, *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) for a sustained critical treatment of the afterlife of Oppen's seriality in the work of postmodernist poets.

17. Throughout this chapter, I use *deictics* in both a strict linguistic sense, and in that broader conceptual sense employed by Roland Barthes, in "The Discourse of

History," trans. Stephen Bann, *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981): 7–21. In this important essay, Barthes explores the deictic as an expression of the "movement of the discourse in relation to its matter, or more precisely a movement in relation to the sequence of its matter." Ibid., 8.

18. Excellent discussions of deixis include: Charles Fillmore, *Lectures on Deixis* (Stanford: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 1997); Stephen Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. chap. 2. The common definition of *deictics* as "pointing words" does not convey the vast reach of this term. The capaciousness and range of deictic reference is the formal linguistic corollary to Vološinov's argument that "the meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context." V. N. Vološinov's, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,* trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 79.

19. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 6.

20. Oppen, *Selected Letters*, 90.

21. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 14.

22. The OED marks 1920 as the first emergence of the term to describe worker occupations of factories.

23. Lyn Hejinian, "Of the World, Weather-Swept—Preliminary to a Close Reading of George Oppen's Discrete Series," *Thinking Poetics: Essays on George Oppen*, ed. Steve Shoemaker (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 56.

24. L. S. Dembo, "Oppen on his Poems: A Discussion," in Hatlen, ed., *George Oppen*, 200.

25. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (Methuen: London, 1978), 144–45.

26. For Jameson's discussion, see *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), 39.

27. Dembo, in Hatlen, ed., *George Oppen*, 201.

28. Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 49–50.

29. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 15.

30. Oppen, *Selected Letters*, 20, 111.

31. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 12.

32. Oppen, *Selected Letters*, 327.

33. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 23.

34. Joris Ivens's *The Bridge* (1928) is another appropriate cinematic comparison: it employs the then new temporal vertigo of time lapse in order to reveal dynamic labor process that precedes the fact of a completed, static bridge. Using time lapse to restore past labor to the present, Ivens's project resembles Oppen's as it refuses to let labor remain hidden.

35. See, for example, Rita Felski, *Gender and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), and the excellent source books of Bonnie Kime Scott, *The*

Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), and *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

36. On the question of the canonical modernists, gender, and misogyny see Lesley Hall Higgins, *The Modernist Cult of Ugliness: Aesthetic and Gender Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), and Frank Lentricchia *Modernist Quartet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also Pound's postscript to his translation of Remy De Gourmont's *The Natural Philosophy of Love* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), which offers a rich account of the poet's own thoughts on gender, poetic form, and social destiny.

37. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 28.

38. Tom Sharp, "George Oppen, *Discrete Series*, 1929–1934," in Hatlen, ed., *George Oppen,* 291.

39. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 29.

40. See Felski, *Gender and Modernity*, chap. 3, "Imagined Pleasures: The Erotics and Aesthetics of Consumption," 61–90.

41. Crispinus versifies: "I do make Verses, when I come in such a Street as this: O/your City-Ladies, you shall ha' 'em sit in every Shop like the/*Muses*—off'ring you the *Castalian* Dews, and the *Thespian* Liquors, to/as many as have but the sweet Grace and Audacity to—sip of their/Lips. Did you never hear any of my Verses?" Ben Jonson, *Poetaster,* ed. Josiah Penniman (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1913).

42. My thanks to Doug Mao for helping to trace this genealogy.

43. Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, 27.

44. Ibid., 35.

Chapter Three. Zukofsky: The Voice of the Fetish

1. Marjorie Perloff, "'Barbed-Wire Entanglements': The 'New American Poetry,' 1930–1932," *Modernism/modernity* 2, no. 1 (1995): 147.

2. Ibid., 168, 147.

3. Charles Bernstein, "Objectivist Blues: Scoring Speech in Second-Wave Modernist Poetry and Lyrics," *American Literary History* 20, nos. 1–2 (2008): 364.

4. Barry Ahearn, ed., *Pound/Zukofsky* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 168.

5. Ibid., 171–72.

6. Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes. (London: Penguin, 1992), 163–64.

7. Ahearn, ed., *Pound/Zukofsky*, 172.

8. Ezra Pound, *Personae: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990), 61.

9. I allude here to the title of El Lissitzky's Constructivist poster, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1919).

10. Helpfully, Scroggins defines rested totality as "a musical form in which these

particulars may resonate both in turn and simultaneously in a reader's mind, imparting to that reader a knowledge that goes beyond that of elements presented sequentially to a knowledge of the relationships of those particulars with one another." *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 143.

11. On the multiple mystifications of the commodity's form of appearance, see Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, esp. 164–65.

12. Ibid., 198.

13. Ibid., 176.

14. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 11.

15. Louis Zukofsky, *First Half of "A"—9* (New York: Louis Zukofsky, 1940), 37.

16. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (London: Macmillan, 1978), 31.

17. Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 124.

18. Zukofsky, *First Half of "A"—9*, 1.

19. Pound, *Personae*, 29.

20. Zukofsky, *First Half of "A"—9*, 35.

21. Ibid., 37.

22. Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations*, 129.

23. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 143.

24. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 538–39.

25. Zukofsky, *First Half of "A"—9*, 1.

26. Zukofsky, *"A"—9*, 106.

27. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 102.

28. Zukofsky, *"A"—7*, 41–42.

29. Zukofsky, *"A"—9*, 106–7.

30. Ibid., 107.

31. Ibid.

32. Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions +: The Collected Critical Essays,* ed. Mark Scroggins (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 13.

33. Raya Dunayevskaya, "Marx's Humanism Today," in *Socialist Humanism*, ed. Erich Fromm (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 73.

34. Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, 56.

35. Ibid., 203.

36. *Karl Marx,* "The Holy Family Or Critique of Critical Criticism," *Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975), *85–86.*

37. Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 1–13.

38. See, for example, Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), and Pascal Casanova, *The Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

39. Zukofsky, *"A"—9*, 107.

40. Ibid.

41. Zukofsky, *First Half of "A"—9*, 41.

42. Barrett Watten's chapter "The Constructivist Moment: From El Lissitsky to Detroit Techno" (147–96), in his *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), is an excellent elaboration of such a hermeneutic.

43. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Price of Denmark*, in *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 1997), 1706.

44. Mark Scroggins discusses the poet's extensive consumption of the Western canon, in Yiddish, throughout his adolescence. *Louis Zukofsky and the Poetry of Knowledge*, 19.

45. Quoted in Zukofsky, *Bottom: On Shakespeare* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 431.

46. Ibid., 431.

47. See Alan Filreis for a superlative account of the ways in which American anti-Communism has distorted the history, and shaped the canon, of American poetry. See Alan Filreis, *Counter-revolution of the Word: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poety 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

48. Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 104–5.

49. Zukofsky, *"A"—9*, 108.

50. Ibid.

51. DuPlessis has created a rich reading hermeneutic indebted in part to John Shoptaw's proposal of a "technique of' studying the impact of unwritten words and phrases' which involves reading for "crypt words" and "crypt phrases" in a poem." See Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24.

52. Zukofsky, *"A"—9*, 108.

53. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +,* 13.

54. Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, 164–65.

55. Ibid., 165.

Chapter Four. Niedecker: The Interior Voice Commodified

1. See Lisa Pater Faranda *"Between your house and mine": The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman, 1960 to 1970* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986). Also,

Jenny Penberthy, ed., *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky, 1931–1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

2. The many different definitions of Surrealism that have arisen reflect the diversity of the tradition. Closest to Niedecker's own practice is the definition offered by André Breton in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1929). Niedecker explicitly rejects the more strictly psychologistic version of Surrealism expressed in Breton's pre-Communist first "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924). The formal and political concerns of the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," however, speak directly to the forms and stakes of Niedecker's work. In addition to acknowledging the potential ideological character of "automatic writing," the "Second Manifesto" defines Surrealism's aims as "quite simply at the total recovery of our psychic force by a means which is nothing other than the dizzying descent into ourselves, the systematic illumination of hidden places and the progressive darkening of other places, the perpetual excursion into the midst of forbidden territory." See André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism." *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, ed. and trans. Helen Lane and Richard Seaver (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 136–37. What makes surrealist work unique, Breton argues here, is its attempt to simultaneously deterritorialize interior and exterior life. Indeed, in the more radical moments of the second manifesto, Breton suggests that Surrealism's historical success depends on overcoming the contradiction between exterior and interior life entirely. As this chapter argues, Niedecker's hybrid of Surrealism and Objectivism allows her both to record the material world as it is transformed by the interior processes of thought and perception, and vice versa, to materialize the contents of interior life.

3. Elizabeth Willis's article "The Milk Seperator and the New Goose: Niedecker, Eisenstein and the Poetics of Non-indifference," *How 2* 1, no. 7 (2002) also resists the use of region and relationship as a means to identify generic poetic trajectories. Her fascinating article investigates formal and political resonances between Niedecker and Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein.

4. A notable exception to this pattern of neglect is Peter Nicholls's essay "Lorine Niedecker: Rural Surreal." This work is meant to supplement Nicholls's observation that Niedecker's surrealism is an extension of Zukofsky's desire to poetically embody "the fact *as it forms*." Nicholls also brings up important points about the specificity of Niedecker's surrealism, mediated as it was by her reading of Eugene Jolas's surrealist periodical *Transition.* However, as I demonstrate, Niedecker's surrealism does not, as Nicholls would have it, oppose the "practice of *writing*" to a "poetics of the inner life." Rather, her work reveals the sober investigation of the ideological constructedness of interiority to be an essential part of materialist, feminist, Objectivist "*writing*." See Jenny Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1996), 198.

5. Niedecker's fraught relationship to Objectivism is oft-debated among scholars of her work. For example, Perloff prefers to align Niedecker with a Dickensonian

tradition, arguing that while the poetry certainly has Objectivist qualities, it possesses a "personal stridency that looks beyond the stylistic habits of her male counterparts to the specific problems of her own situation, problems in which gender certainly," Perloff summarizes breezily, "plays a role." *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 49. John Lowney will put a finer point on Niedecker's departure from Objectivism, differentiating her work from "Objectivist . . . and more generally her Modernist contemporaries by the ways it foregrounds the multiple roles gender plays in relation to social class, work, and the family." See "Poetry, Property and Propriety: Lorine Niedecker and the Legacy of the Great Depression," *Sagetrieb* (1999): 30. Neither critic, however, had the benefit of access to Niedecker's surrealist works, though Penberthy enjoyed access to the triptychs, if not *Progression* yet, when she wrote in 1992 on Niedecker's early works. She, too, acknowledges the foundational role of Objectivism in Niedecker's development as a poet but also remarks that Niedecker "is far more intent on her independently evolved surrealism. See "'The Revolutionary Word': Lorine Niedecker's Early Writings 1928–1946," *West Coast Line* (1992): 79. For those interested in a more strictly literary biographical account of Niedecker's relationship to Zukofsky, this article offers a detailed genealogy of the two poets' personal and epistolary exchanges in the 1930s.

6. Quoted in Penberthy, *Lorine Niedecker*, 177–78.

7. Penberthy, ed., *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931–1970*, 213.

8. Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions +: The Collected Critical Essays,* ed. Mark Scroggins (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 13.

9. Ibid, 194.

10. DuPlessis notes in her essay "Lorine Niedecker, the Anonymous: Gender, Class, Genre and Resistances" that "elements of a modernist and objectivist aesthetic seem . . . to take on a gender function for Niedecker." Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker*, 126.

11. Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 25–26.

12. Quoted in Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker*, 44.

13. Abraham Lincoln, *The Portable Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Andrew Delbanco (New York: Penguin, 1992), 186.

14. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 578.

15. Quoted in Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker*, 177–78.

16. Zukofsky, *Prepositions +*, 12.

17. Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 26.

18. Ibid., 27.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 28.

21. Zukofsky, *Prepositions* +, 12.

22. Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 31–32.

23. Ibid., 32.

24. Penberthy, ed., *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky*, 27.

25. Quoted in Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker*, 182. "Canvass" is the title of the first poem of the three-poem series: "Canvass," "For exhibition," and "Tea." Arranged side by side on the same page, each poem title in the series is also marked by Niedecker as corresponding to three states: Niedecker links "Canvass" to "subconscious"; "For exhibition" to "wakeful"; and "Tea" to "full consciousness."

26. Niedecker, *Collected Works*, 33.

27. Ibid.

28. See Jameson's *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), esp. 23–30. Here he describes the contours of the modernist ideological construction of its own historicity as a "twofold movement, in which the foregrounding of continuities, the insistent unwavering focus on the seamless passage from past to present, slowly turns into a consciousness of a radical break; while at the same time the enforced attention to a break gradually turns the latter into a period in its own right" (24).

29. *Collected Works*, 33.

30. This triptych is another "experiment in verticality;" its arrangement on the page is identical to the "Canvass" series. Similarly, each poem corresponds to three states: "Beyond what" to "subconscious"; "I heard" to "toward monologue"; and "Memorial Day" to "social-banal."

31. *Collected Works*, 34.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Quoted in Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker*, 186.

35. Theodor Adorno, "Looking Back on Surrealism." *Notes to Literature,* Vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 86–90.

36. Quoted in Penberthy, ed. *Lorine Niedecker*, 178.

37. Adorno, "Looking Back," 87.

38. Ibid.

39. Quoted in Penberthy, ed., *Lorine Niedecker*, 182.

40. Penberthy cites an exemplary platitude: "True bravery is/ shown by performing/ without witness what/one might be capable/of doing before all the world." *Collected Works*, 371. Subsequent references are to this edition.

41. Ibid., 41.

42. Ibid., 42.

43. Ibid., 47.

44. Ibid., 50.
45. Ibid., 65.
46. Ibid., 50.
47. Ibid., 51.
48. Ibid., 61.
49. Ibid., 67.
50. Ibid., 44.
51. Zukofsky, *Prepositions* +, 13.
52. Here I refer to Peter Bürger's famous thesis in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (trans. Michael Shaw [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984]) which defines the avant-garde (as opposed to just modernism) as an always asymptotic artistic attempt to change the lifeworld itself.
53. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 163.
54. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 144.

Chapter Five. Zukofsky: Counterfetishistic Literacy

1. John Beecher, "Beaufort Tides", *Collected Poems, 1924–1974* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 21.
2. Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 84–85. Emphasis added.
3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 595.
4. Louis Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 81–82.
5. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1995), 165.
6. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 52.
7. Ibid., 52–53.
8. Ibid., 53.
9. *Capital,* Vol. 1, 155. Emphasis added.
10. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 65.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 57.
14. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 81.
15. Louis Zukofsky, Draft of *Anew,* Louis Zukofsky Collection*,* Ts. Box 1, Folder 1, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.
16. Sol Funaroff, "The Bellbuoy," in *The Spider and the Clock* (New York: International Publishers, 1938), 7.

17. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 103.

18. Dante Alighieri, *The Paradiso*, in *The Divine Comedy*: *The Inferno, The Purgatorio,* and *The Paradiso,* trans. John Ciardi (New York: New American Library, 2003), 806–7.

19. Thanks to Z-site, we know that Zukofsky used the 1928 edition of *Capital*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul.

20. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 103–4.

21. Ibid., 93.

22. See, respectively, Michael Golston, "Petalbent Devils: Louis Zukofsky, Lorine Niedecker and the Surrealist Praying Mantis," *Modernism/modernity* 13, no. 2 (2006): 325–47; Michael Heller, "Objectivists in the Thirties: Utopolyptic Moments," in Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, eds. *The Objectivist Nexus*, 144–59; and Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

23. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 65–66.

24. Ibid., 66.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Golston, "Petelbent Devils," 329.

28. While my reading of the poem focuses primarily on aesthetic mediation and the convocation of revolutionary consciousness, it is clear that the poem turns upon racialized tropes. The mantis possesses eyes "*black* bright and poor" (emphasis added), underscoring the ways in which the apperception of class is mediated by race and vice versa. The mantis is also imported from Surrealism's promotion of "primitive" arts. Complexly, the poem seeks to stitch together the emergent (the revolutionary black proletarian) with the residual (African tribal myth). This is not unlike the work performed by the reference to "Old Europe's poor," which also uses the interdependence of the residual and the emergent to illuminate the mediations of the present. However, while the mantis eye-image could be convincingly argued as operating within the logic of a racialized essentialism, it can also be read as the dialectical metabolization of historical left Black discourses, two tributaries of which included the *strategic* essentialism of Africanist cultural and political nationalism and the Marxist tradition of a political orientation to the emergent Black proletariat.

29. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 66.

30. "March Comrades: Words for a Workers' Chorus from *'A'*—8," *New Masses* 8 (May 1938).

31. Ezra Pound, *Personae: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990), 251.

32. Ezra Pound, *A Memoire of Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 86–87.

33. Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry*, 88.

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